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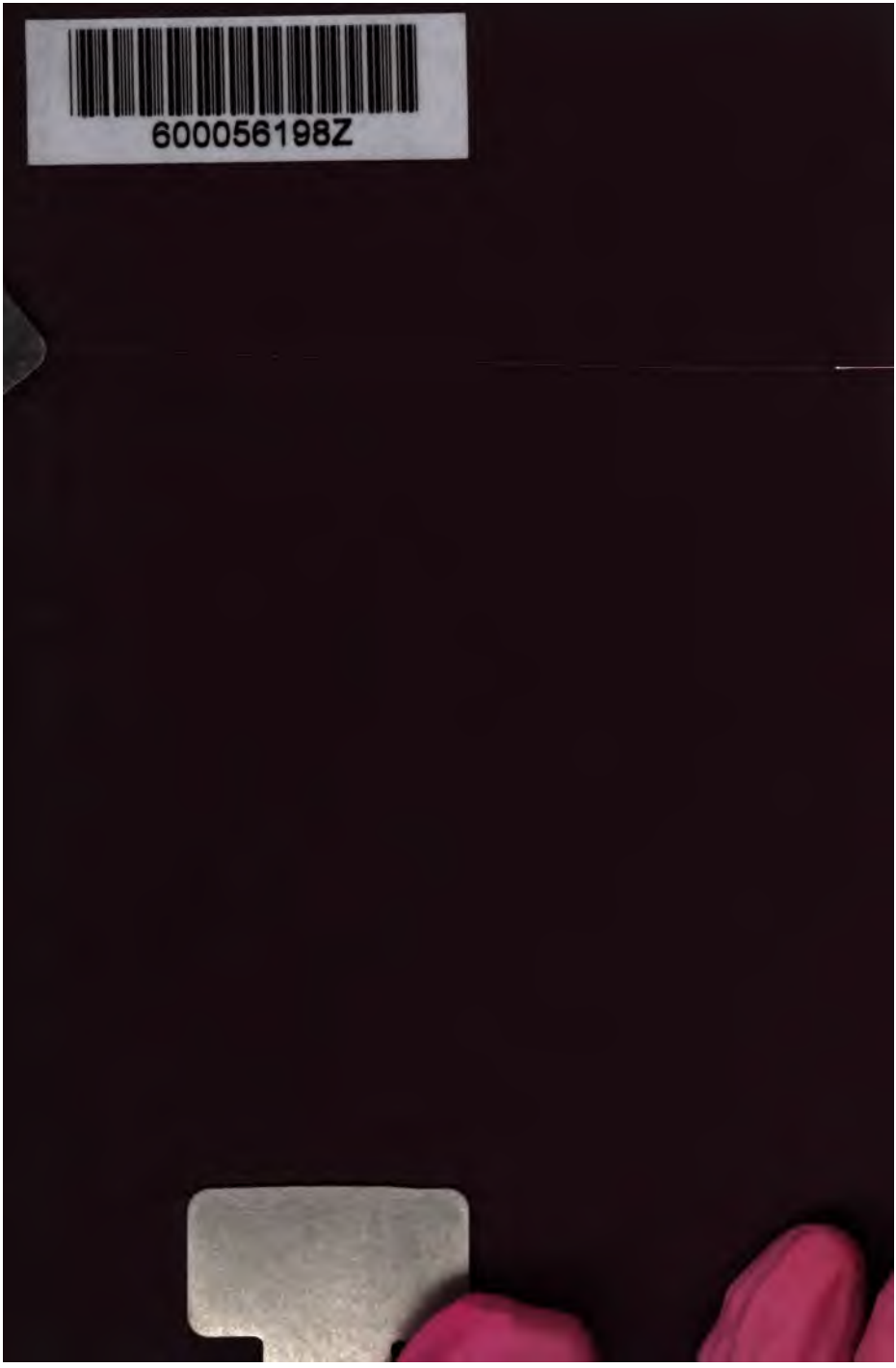
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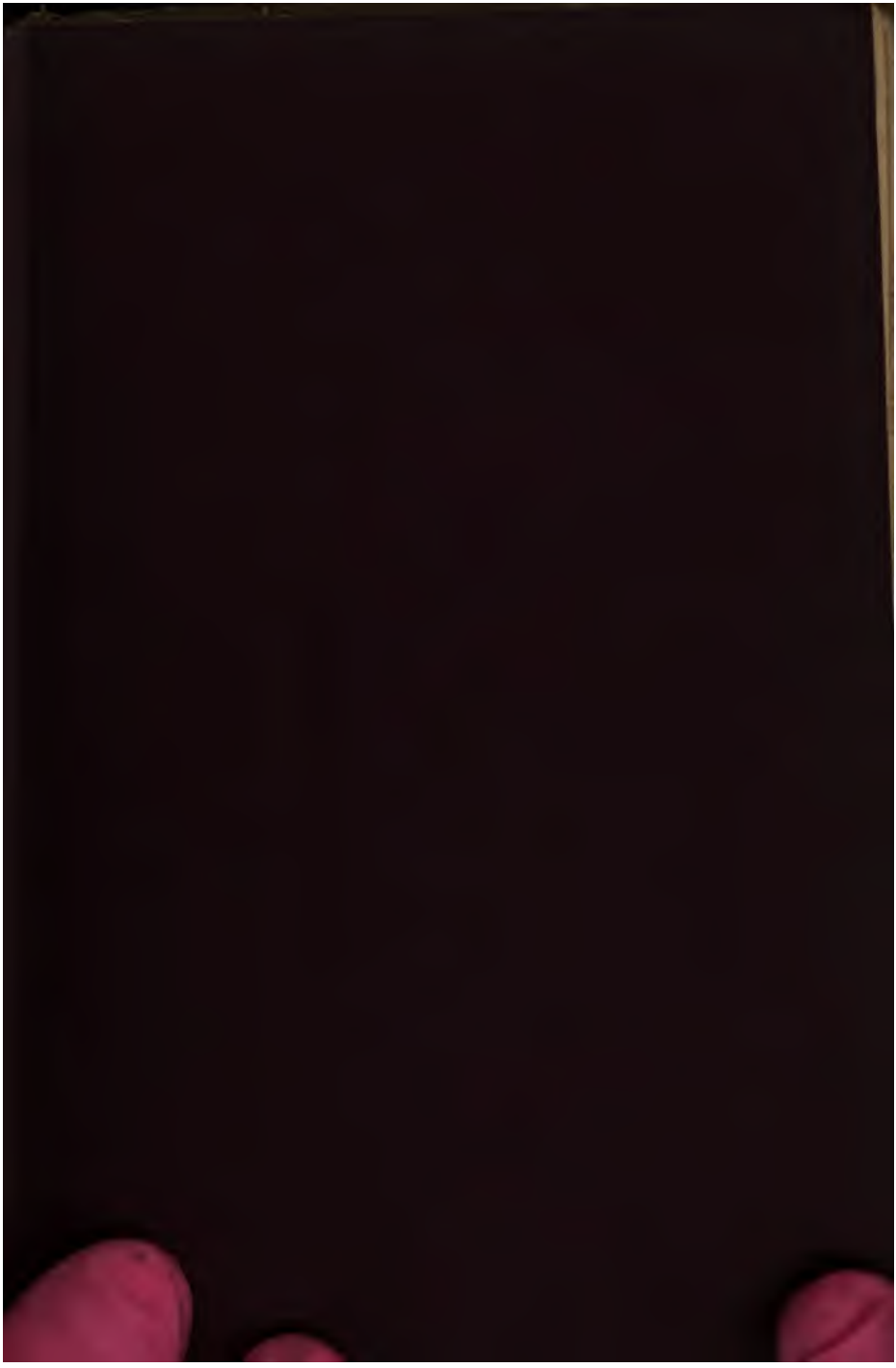

MARGERY TRAVERS.

VOL. I.

MARGERY TRAVERS

BY

A. E. N. BEWICKE

AUTHOR OF

"THE LAST OF THE JERNINGHAMES,"
"ONWARDS, BUT WHITHER?"
&c., &c.

"How shall a man escape from his ancestors, or draw off from his veins the black drop which he drew from his father's or his mother's life?"
EMERSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BOOK I.

TEMPTED.

MARGERY TRAVERS.

CHAPTER I.

"HOW DELICIOUS IS THE WINNING OF A KISS AT LOVE'S BEGINNING!"

"LIFE might be so very pleasant," she said, with a deep sigh.

"Yes, it might be. Why should it not?" he asked, more cheerfully. "Why should not we together——"

She glanced up quickly, then looked down again with a changing colour.

"I cannot tell you how, at times, even before I knew you, I have longed for some one to give a purpose to my life, and

encourage me to do something, not just get through one day after another, each more purposelessly than the other. And since I have known you, I have known there is only one person who could do that. You could."

The scene was the ground-floor sitting-room, the dining-room, as it is called, of a London lodging; the speakers were a young man, with frank, blue eyes and tight-curling fair hair, and a girl, who looked almost older, with features so regular as to be severe, had they not been redeemed from that by the extreme sweetness of the mouth, and the dreamy brilliancy of the large grey eyes that were at this moment raised, looking full into the young man's face.

"You know that I am poor," said the girl, looking at him with all the dignity of a Roman statue. "I have enough to live

upon. I do not complain. But I have always understood that you meant to marry money."

"So I did," cried he, clasping his hands in his excitement now, as if petitioning for pardon. "Till I knew you I was like other men, and I knew the Priory might be made a very pretty place, but that there was little enough money ever likely to go with it, and during my father's lifetime I could only look for an allowance. And I thought *the* thing to wish for was hunters and four-in-hands, and what other men care for. But now I know you are the thing to wish for, and the only thing. Why, in this room with you I have been happy, so happy, as I could not have fancied it possible to be before. And we could manage something better than this, if we were together. Only say that you do not despise me too much, that you do not

care for some one else, that you think you might some day care for me. I know that you ought to have a lover who would do great things for your sake, and I could never do anything great, even if there were anything great to do now. But I love you with my whole heart. Believe me, you could not be loved better."

The girl brushed away a tear hurriedly.

"It would be so delightful," she said. "Why should it not be?" But she looked away mournfully as she spoke, turning from the young man with his erect manly bearing, and the delicate flowers with their hothouse scent in his button-hole, and looking sadly round at the tattered antemacassars, and threadbare carpet of a redoubtable pattern, that had only grown tolerable through utter dinginess.

"Why, indeed? If you think it would be delightful—if only you think that," and

he moved quickly, trying to look into her face.

But she turned it full on him now, as she said,

"How can you doubt that I should think so? How should it be otherwise? Do you think I am not human, that I should not appreciate the happiness of being loved, I, who have no one, who am quite alone in the world? Then, though you say you are not rich, and that the Priory wants money, do you think there would not be a charm to me in having to do with such a place, and in living in the bright, prosperous world in which you live? There is no pleasure to me in being poor, I can tell you. There is no pleasure in living all alone, and without position in the world. Do you not see that you offer me everything I could possibly desire—position, connection, money, companion-

ship, *and* love? The temptation is too great." Her chest heaved, and her whole frame quivered, as she spoke these last words, turning away, and almost wringing her hands.

"But why call it a temptation?" he asked, taking her hand in his, and looking down tenderly yet anxiously into the stern young face.

"Why?" cried she, drawing herself up now, and looking at him unflinchingly, yet with her eyes full of tears. "Have you ever asked me if I loved you? And what right have I to all you offer me without that?"

"And you do not," he said, speaking so sadly now that the girl interrupted him at once, stroking caressingly the hand that had clasped hers the moment before.

"Oh, yes, I do, Allan. Yes, I do. How can I help it? You have been so good to

me, and I have no one else. I do love you, yes, indeed I do, dear Allan." Then with a sudden revulsion of feeling, "But if I had all the world to choose from, I should never have chosen you. It is fair you should know that," and she dropped his hand, and walked away to the window, and looked out through the scanty muslin curtains, with her back turned to him, so that he only saw her shoulders shivering a little, as she stared out into the shabby little street, where only the milk-boy was going his rounds, and a maid cleaning a doorstep. It was a mean little street, and the room was a mean little room. No one could have seen Margery Travers in such surroundings, and not wished to remove her to a more fitting sphere. She would have looked so natural at a Drawing-room, with diamonds flashing in her hair, she was so evidently made to wear satin rather

than alpaca, yet now only alpaca had fallen to her lot, and that, as it seemed, of the shabbiest.

"I do not care whether you would have chosen me out of all the world, or not," said the young man, following her, and speaking with a voice that trembled with feeling. "I know I am not worthy to ask you to be my wife, I do not deserve you in any way. I wish I did—for your sake, that I might make you happier. But as it is—as you have not all the world to choose from, and as I am—only what I am, do you think you could ever get to care for me?"

There was a reality, a humility about his words that must have touched the heart of any woman. The girl to whom he addressed them was a true woman.

"I could never get not to do so," said she, gazing round at him wistfully, her

mouth growing tenderer and more pathetic than ever, strangely out of character with the proud carriage of the head, and the sternness of the rest of the beautiful young face. "You do not understand me, and I believe you never will. I know how foolish it is in me to try to explain it to you, only it seems dishonourable not to do so, whilst you offer me everything. I do love you, I love you better than you love me, I believe, already. But I have never loved anyone before, never anyone in all my life. I have never allowed myself to do so, and it is so hard to pass through life like that. I knew, though, it was the only way for me, and I did not even dare pet a dog, lest I should break down. Then you came, and you were kind—so kind," her voice trembled, "and you were *not* in love with my beauty." She spoke the words passionately. "You were kind, because I

was miserable, not because I was beautiful, and you have been kind to me ever since, always kind, and always noble, treating me as if I were a lady, your equal, as I might have been, but as I am not. Oh, I have not owned it to myself ever before, but I own it to you now, that I care for you so much already that I could almost strangle myself to think I have confessed it to you, for it is not a good thing for you to love me! I know it is not. You might be so happy leading the calm, easy-going life of an eldest son and a country squire, and you could so easily have found some nice, well brought up girl with money, who would make you a much better wife than I ever could, and who would please your family much better. Now, what will they say to me? Have you thought of that? A girl without a connection even, living in London lodgings by herself, and with

£100 a year to do it on! Your people will never hear of it. Give it up—give it up, dear Allan. It will never answer. Look upon me as a friend, as a woman who loved you, if you like. But do not think of loving me any more, though I shall always be grateful to you that you have done so. It will always make a bright spot in my life to look back upon to think that you once loved me well enough to think of giving up all your prospects for my sake, and that with all the world to choose from you yet thought you would have chosen me for your wife, if—if everything had been different. But it is not different," she added, with a sweet, tender smile, glancing down at her shabby dress, and round at her shabby room. "I saw your sister once, and I know I have been born into a different sphere."

She had spoken at first with that intense passion that exhausts the listener almost as much as the speaker. But, as she paused, her manner was that of a woman accepting her lot, not thinking it a very bright one, perhaps, yet not repining, accepting it as hers, in fact.

"Even you!" she added, softly, "man though you are, and with that privilege to know what is evil, which men claim for themselves—no, not you, I never meant you, only perhaps the men I have known—but even you can form but a faint idea of the vile, wicked scenes through which I have lived and grown up. This life here, that I know does not strike you as very brilliant, is calm and happy after that. All things go by comparison, you know. And I think, if I lived this life for a year or two, I think I might almost learn to laugh, as I have heard other girls do."

Poor Margery! making her last forlorn attempt to persuade Allan Stapleton that she was happy. She had not chosen her words carefully, for they first made him aware that he had never heard her laugh, could not even as yet fancy her doing so.

"Margery, say you will be true to me, and nothing shall ever make me give you up," cried he, taking hold of one of her hands, while with his other arm he drew her nearer to him.

The girl resisted for a moment longer, while the expressions coursed each other over her face. Then she yielded, and like a tired child rested her head upon his shoulder.

"I feel as if I ought to thank you so much for loving me—so much—so very much," she murmured. "And yet, after all—after all—why should money make such a difference?"

"It does not," cried he, looking down at the beautiful face, as if he longed to kiss it, yet dared not even now, and reading her thoughts with that instinctive tact sometimes to be found in the most apparently practical and unromantic of men, the last people whom their brother men would credit with any knowledge of women. "It does not. That is your fancy. And you need never think that I shall not look upon you as far, far above me. For I know you are in beauty, in talent, in steadiness of purpose, in everything—even in length of pedigree," he added, laughingly.

But he felt her shiver from head to foot as he said the last words.

She raised her head from his shoulder at once, and looked at him searchingly without speaking for a moment or two, then she asked, coldly and indifferently,

"Shall you ever have courage to tell your father about me?"

"Why not, dearest? Are you not a daughter-in-law such as any man might be proud of? There's not a girl in all the county could hold a candle to you for looks, and as to talent—I am no judge of that, but *you* know, Margery, how clever you are. And as to goodness, if I did not think you were good—why, I do not think I should love and honour you with all my heart as I do now."

Even over Allan Stapleton's frank, open countenance, there came a dreamy expression. He did not know on what his belief in Margery's goodness rested; he had the impression that she tried with all her might to do what was right, but he did not at all know on what his impression was based, nor when it had first arisen. Yet he believed in her love of right so firmly that, had his

belief in that been shaken, it would have gone hardly with his love, at least for a time, if not for ever.

"You do indeed love me," said the girl, smiling sorrowfully. "You speak of me as if you were writing my epitaph. But, now listen to me, for a moment, Allan, and do not interrupt me, please. It has so happened that our paths in life have crossed each other, and you have been very kind to me, and now you think you want me to be your wife, and if it were only for gratitude I could not say no. But, as it is, I cannot, because—I love you, and if you continue to wish to have me for your wife, I will do the very best I can to make you happy, and to be a good wife to you. But if —now do not interrupt me, Allan—if you should ever cease to wish to have me for your wife, if you should ever think that you could be happy without me, and with

some girl rich and pretty and well connected, such as your people would like, then you are never to think of me again. Now promise me that, Allan."

"My dearest, how can I promise you anything so preposterous? As if I could ever be happy without you."

"Well, if it is so preposterous, it matters the less what you promise about it. So now promise me, if that time should ever come, never to think of me again. Promise me, Allan."

"If I forget you, Margery, I promise I will forget you. There! will that satisfy you?" asked he, smiling.

"Not quite. But it will do. If that time should ever come, you will remember then what I asked you to promise, and it will set your conscience at rest."

"Have you so little confidence in my love for you? Do you trust me so little?"

"Oh, no, I trust you altogether," said she, with a half sob. "Do I not show how completely I trust you by talking to you freely and frankly from my heart, as if you were my father, brother, lover, all in one? And I have not made you ask long for my love. No one can say I exacted any long wooing," said she, dreamily, "and yet people used to call me so proud—so proud. You cannot call me proud. Afterwards, if you ever feel inclined to break your faith with me, you can always say she was so easily won, she let herself be won so easily, I had no time to know if I really cared for her before she was mine. Oh, there are plenty of excuses you might make!"

"Margery, you will hurt me, if you say anything of this kind again," said the young man, biting his lip.

She looked at him startled. She had

had to think of herself and for herself all her life, and, alas! it was a new thing to her to think of the feelings of another. She came near and rested her hands on his shoulder.

"Dear Allan, do you not see it is to save my own pride? In case you ever should throw me over. But I will say no more about it. I will not vex you. Only all the people I have known have cared about rank and fortune; is it so wonderful then that I find it almost impossible to believe that you should overlook everything in my favour? How can I ever thank you enough?"

"Only by loving me, Margery. That is all I ask of you. Just to love me a little."

"A little!" cried she, with a sudden stamp of the foot. "There you ask an impossiblity. Could a Travers ever do a thing a little? When we are ruined, we

are ruined utterly; when we undertake to do a thing, we do it, though we die under it; and when we love, we love with our whole hearts. Not a little, Allan."

"Well, I will not quarrel with you about that. But *can* you love me with your whole heart, Margery? I should not have thought that possible."

A sudden terror seemed to seize the girl. She had early seen the worst side of life, as she thought, but her acquaintance had lain almost exclusively among men, so, as is so often the case, she was quite unsuspicious that she knew less of life than the ordinary well-bred Belgravian young lady of fifteen, who has ridden in the Row ever since she was fit to manage a pony, and knows perfectly well what to ask questions about, and what to pass over in silence. Margery had no ideas on this subject, but she thought she knew sadly much

of life, and understood everything, so she recovered herself quickly, and, glancing up at her lover's eager blue eyes and flushed, questioning face, patted his shoulder lightly.

"Your head will be quite turned, if I say anything more to-day. Something must be kept for by-and-by. To-morrow will come some day, you know. And that reminds me that to-day is over for both of us. You must not stay any longer with me now, Allan. You have never done so before, you know, and fancy your sister behaving in such a way, if any gentleman told her he cared for her. She would not let him stay on with her hour after hour, nor speak as frankly as I have done."

"I do not know what Una would do under such circumstances, but I know she could never be half so perfect as you, except for one thing. *She* would not

doubt that *he* meant to keep his faith."

"*She* would not doubt it! No, of course *she* would not doubt it," said Margery, almost bitterly; then lightly—"That just shows how different we are. But now good-bye, Allan," and she looked up, as if almost expecting the kiss that met her lips. "And remember you must not come to see me again till you come with your father and mother, knowing that we are engaged. Yes, it must be so, Allan. Please do not say anything against it. Remember I am not like other girls. I am all alone. I have no one whose consent I can ask, and some one's consent must be asked. One cannot fancy an engagement without that. You can write to me, if you like. You will write to me, I know. I shall long for a letter. But I cannot see you again till your people know all about it. I

do not say till they approve, because, after all, you are of age, and you are a man. Only they must know, it must be known."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HE THOUGHT OF IT AFTERWARDS, AND WHAT SHE THOUGHT.

LIKE a peasant girl in love, and without anything of the Roman statue about her, Margery went to the window, and drawing aside the muslin drapery, stiff as a board, but ragged as a board could not be, looked out at her lover passing down the street. No wonder he turned and looked back, turned and looked back again, till if there had been any temptation to the inhabitants of this shabby No Thoroughfare to sit at their windows looking out they might have laughed to see the beauti-

ful girl gazing so kindly yet so fondly after him, and the good-looking young man so loth to go away. Not but that most people find the soft side of their heart uppermost, where a pair of good-looking young lovers is concerned. Even the crusty old bachelor feels something melt for a moment, though he may speak in only a sharper tone to the next person that addresses him, as if in self-vindication; whilst as to the proverbially tender-hearted old maid, it is well known how she draws out her pocket-handkerchief, and thinks of a faded flower, and a life that has passed away. There are, I fear, no depths of dissimulation to which she would not resort to help a pair of thwarted lovers to a moment's happy meeting. Whilst as to the young men and maidens, "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind," and it is easy enough to guess what they feel when they

catch sight of lovers parting. But as it was, no one saw Allan go backing down the street but the postman, and he was so accustomed to being welcomed like Cupid himself on St. Valentine's day, and many another, that his feelings were a little worn out on the subject, and he did not take much notice.

The street looked very desolate to Margery when the good-looking young fellow had passed out of it, when his loving eyes had looked back at her for the last time, when his sunny hair no longer shed a little adventitious brightness upon the general dinginess. He was not beautiful as she was, with a beauty such as sculptors or painters might go wild about. But he was a good-looking young fellow enough, fresh with air and exercise, and shown off to advantage with a Poole-made coat, and a couple of exotics in his button-hole. He

spent more on bouquets during the season than the girl he loved had for her year's income. To her, in her poverty and shabbiness, and rather grimy respectability, he was like a young prince. And yet Margery, for all her present dinginess, had been brought in contact with princes before now, and it was not the young man's air and bearing that had made her face soften, and her heart melt towards him. It was the feeling that he was a brave, true-hearted gentleman, and that he loved her, was not simply dazzled by her, as many a man had been before, and moth-like scorched himself somewhat.

Whilst he had been there present a terror had seized her for a moment, when he had asked her whether it were possible that she could love him with her whole heart; but now that he was gone there was nothing to hinder her idealis-

ing him to her heart's content. It was simple fact when she had told him she had never loved anyone before; and she had not spoken as many a girl speaks, implying only that no lover had ever yet moved her heart.

Margery was twenty-one now, and she could not recollect her mother; and but for the shock of it, the death of her father, for whom she still wore mourning clothes, had been a relief to her. She barely recollected, when she first had had so-called lovers—offers of marriage that had come to her through her father, and that she had refused in her own person. What she had yearned for was some one to love, as a girl loves a father, mother, brother, sister, even a friend. Men offered her coronets, or large estates, sometimes only a beautiful villa, or fine clothes, and they laid, as they said, their hearts at her feet.

All this had made no impression upon Margery; they had not offered her some one to love, they were not lovable. Once when she was still a child her heart had been full to bursting, and she had seen a woman with a wan, weary face, who like herself seemed to know no women nor be known by them, and she had caught hold of her white, wasted hand, and pressed it to her own burning forehead, saying, in soft Italian accents,

"Oh! for the love of God, madam, will you not love me a little? I think I could be content to die, if but some woman would kiss and love me first."

With blanched face and distended eyes the beautifully dressed lady had looked at her, and exclaimed,

"Why, in the Heaven's name, child, do you pick me out of all the crowd here?"

It was whilst the *table d'hôte* was stream-

ing out from one of the most fashionable restaurants at Saxon that the little scene passed. I do not of course mean much when I say most fashionable. Bex is, or was, a *very* cheap place to live at, and from Bex you can go to Saxon, and at Saxon you can gamble, but there never was much fashion there.

Margery looked up tremblingly. It had been such an effort to her to speak, and yet she had felt as if her heart must burst, if she did not.

"You have not given anyone love yet, and you *could* love some one, I am sure," said the child.

"Yes—yes, I love you," cried the other, her eyes still distended and her face still blanched. "But I cannot kiss you, and you must never speak to me again, Some day when you are older you will understand, and then you will remember that you alone

poured balm upon a bruised heart, and that——Now, while you are young, remember only that I love you, that I shall never forget you till I die, then—who knows? See, your father is calling to you. You must *never* speak to me again, but do not repeat what I have said to you."

Margery went back to her father, and the six or seven men standing about him, all lost in wonder as to what she and the, to her, strange lady had been talking about. But she kept her own counsel, though received with a volley of coarse jokes, the tenth part of which she did not understand. The colour mounted to her brow, her head was more thrown back than ever, and her lip curled so that the sharp white teeth were visible underneath. At last she burst into tears. Her father patted her on the shoulder, and told her not to be so silly. She shrank away from his touch, as if it

had bruised her. A young German took her by the hand and led her away, and coaxed and caressed her; at last he made believe to kiss the tears away. Margery let him do it, she was so humbled in her misery, and she was only a child then, barely fourteen. She would not, however, kiss him in return, as he asked her. Afterwards she heard him saying that she had done so, and boasting of the manner in which he had consoled her.

From that day forward Margery let no man have the chance of consoling her again. She wore a stern, hard expression, and sought for no more friends. Some months after she received a parcel by the post. It contained a little old-fashioned Bible, and inside it was a slip of paper:—

"I have many splendid jewels, but the child who asked for my love shall be defiled by none of them. This alone I

brought from my dead mother's home. If I had read it more, I should not have such a weight upon my heart, as I lie dying alone and hopeless. When you receive this token of affection, forget me, or think of me as dead, but try to value my gift now, sweet Margery, and as you grow older, do not despise it because it came from one who dares not even say 'God bless you!'"

It was the first Bible Margery had ever seen; it was the only one she had even now as she stood by the window, idealizing this first human being who had won her love, and accepted it. Allan Stapleton, in fine, whom his friends all called a good fellow, who was known to be the best rider across country in his own county, and the favourite partner of all the girls, though why, no one quite understood; who had no profession, because his father, Sir James,

had thought his only son could do without one, or rather had never troubled his head about it, and because he himself had never done so either, but had boated and cricketed through Eton, and boated and hunted through Oxford, and danced through bits of seasons, and fallen in love a little a good many times, and gone abroad, and met Margery, and returned to England to find he was a good deal in debt, and that the great American heiress, about whose lilies and roses, as well as her diamonds, Pall Mall and St. James's were greatly excited, looked kindly upon him, and, as he had sometimes felt with an answering thrill, felt kindly towards him.

But it was too hot now for lilies and roses in London, and somehow Allan Stapleton never had offered, though he had more than once quite intended doing so. And the American heiress was staying near Good-

wood for the races, and Allan was remaining in town, and he had been to see Margery Travers once, twice, thrice more, and found her quite different from what she had been used to be, at least ten thousand times more charming. So the heiress had become somewhat visionary, and faded into a picture, lilies and roses, propped up by money-bags, no longer winsome and winable, but just a pictured beauty, and Allan did not think any longer of running down to Goodwood, even on the Cup day, did not think of anything, in fact, but his love for Margery, and her love for him, and how Sir James must be told, and of his debts as well.

Not that he thought much of his debts either, as he rode up and down the Row, till he was left sole possessor, and recollected dinner, and realized how impossible it was to eat when the heart was full, and

went down to his Club, and dined very comfortably notwithstanding, having thought fit to order a bottle of champagne, in order to get it down. An older man might have ordered something else, but Allan was young, essentially young, and he drank champagne, and dreamed about his love. Other men were talking of Goodwood. What a poor thing *horses* seemed! Oh! that he had always thought so, and not lost money upon them, and thus thrown additional obstacles in the way of his marriage with Margery! Marriage with Margery! he blushed as he thought of it. How had he ever dared to tell her that he loved her? He could not imagine now. He had had no premeditated scheme, as he went to her that day. But now—now he was a different being, who could speak of love for ever to her now, for was he not ennobled by her love for him! And she

had told him that she loved him with her own sweet lips.

Do not think that he finished that bottle of champagne. No, indeed! his thoughts were intoxicating enough without that, and he heard as from another world the murmur of the men around him about their horses and their bets, while he leant his head upon his hands, and hoped with all his heart that he might prove worthy of Margery, that she might never repent the love that she had given him, that he might be able to shield her from all sin and all sorrow, that, in short, this life might be a heaven to her, and all through him. Meanwhile Margery was saying softly to herself,

"It will never be. Of course, nothing will ever come of it. Perhaps he will not even have the courage to tell his father and mother about me, and it will be of no

good if he does, for, of course, they'll never hear of it. But it will be always something to think of, that he did love me, that out of all the world he did choose me. How strange it seems! There are so many beautiful women nobly bred and nobly born, and he might marry any of them. Any woman would accept him, if he loved her! And he chooses me, with my Travers blood and *my* bringing up. It is true I *have* tried to do the best I could. But I have always felt it in me," she added, with sudden emphasis, "to be so wicked—wickeder than any other woman, I think. I don't deserve it. I don't deserve that he should love me. Only I am so glad he does," and tears flowed from the beautiful grey eyes, and the queenly head was drooped for a moment, whilst a warm glow suffused her cheeks. "To think that it may some day be not only not wrong, but my duty even to

do all that I can to make myself loveable to him! to do little things for him, which he will like all the better because I do them, to mend his gloves for him, to gather flowers for him, even perhaps to work for him, if we are poor! Oh, of all happy things, to be the wife of a good, poor man must be the happiest—living all day for his sake, to make everything bright and beautiful to him! Not to think of oneself at all, only of him! And that he should take it quite naturally, as an every-day thing, what all women do for their husbands! Oh, happy, happy life!" cried Margery, her cheeks glowing, her eyes brimming over with tears, and her hands tight-clasped together. "It makes all the world seem brighter just to think of it all! It makes me so ashamed that I ever felt bitter and discontented, because if all that were to lead to this—why, it was worth bear-

ing it all, and a great deal more. One would bear anything to be happy at last, only to be happy at last, good, and with fixed duties. But sometimes that seems so far off and impossible," and Margery's thoughts reverted to the old days, when she had sometimes felt bitter and discontented. No longer ago than yesterday, but very far away as it seemed now.

Margery felt so joyous, she went to the piano, her only confidante, and began to play an air from a half-forgotten opera of Mercadante's, which came back to her gradually as she went on, and before she knew what she was doing she was singing to the music. Singing so, that the lodgers upstairs sent to ask who it was, and set their door open to listen; singing so, that the maid-of-all-work paused with a tray full of tea-things, and stood open-mouthed to listen; singing so, that the energetic

curate, hurrying by, tired out and hungry, thought that he must have that voice in his choir, and thought it so much that he actually knocked at the door and asked who it was.

But when the landlady, a friend of his, said it was the tall, beautiful young lady who sat always by the pillar in church, and whom surely he must know by sight, then the curate sighed. He could not ask such a splendid-looking young princess as that to join his choir without knowing everything about her first; and he knew nothing about her, but only her face, which had somewhat haunted him of late, and which would haunt him yet more than ever now, since he had heard her voice.

Margery sang on, unconscious even that she was singing. At last she paused, and the rich red colour mantled in her cheek,

as with clasped hands she began to pace up and down the little room.

"So it has come back to me! It has come back to me at last!" she cried. "I always used to think I should be a great singer."

And then recurred to her mind the recollection of a young man she had come across in her many wanderings, a mere stripling, with only down on his lip as yet, but eyes that glowed and grew larger as he talked. As far as she could remember, he had been brought up as heir to a large property, and had just been disinherited, because he would become an artist. For three Summer days she had sat to him for her portrait, and he had talked to her of the grandeur of art, and the delights of a life consecrated to it. He was on his way then to Rome to study, and she had told him she hoped to be a singer, or an actress.

That had been her idea then, and he had bade her be a singer.

"Work at it. Live for it. Do not think of anything else!" he had cried. "I can see by your face you were meant to be something great. Be a great singer, and stir the hearts of multitudes. Any woman can stir the hearts of a few. It is for you to do more. Become the *prima donna* of Europe—of the world. Then I will paint you in your triumph, and you shall sing about my pictures."

He had laughed exultingly, as if it had all already come to pass, and then he had gone away with the glow in his cheeks, and the bright light in his eyes.

It had been an additional trouble added to all Margery's other troubles that, as years passed over her, the voice that had promised so well as a child seemed to have quite abandoned her. Now in this evening's

happiness it had returned, and she recalled the art student's words. A vision of a crowded opera-house, herself the cynosure of all eyes, her heart regulating the beating of all the other hearts around her, a shower of bouquets, and then the intoxicating clamour of applause, floated before Margery's eyes. She had wished for years to be a singer—she felt now that it lay within her power to be among the first, if not the first. "Any woman can stir the hearts of a few—it is for you to stir the hearts of multitudes," floated back to her ears.

"No, no," said she, pressing her hands against her wildly-beating heart. "It is for me to do little things for Allan, and to love him, and be dear to him. I wonder if he would like to hear me sing? Perhaps he would be ashamed, it would re-

mind him my mother was a singer. He might not like that."

Then the idea crossed her mind that he, too, might perhaps be disinherited, if he held true to her. Might she not, then, unite the two dreams of Love and Fame? "But he would not like it," she said, the tears filling her eyes. "No, if they are so angry as that, I must make him forget me, and then—then I will go and be a singer." But the idea had no charm for her now. She sat down very sad and grave, and took up some needlework. Her love-dream was spoilt already. What Travers could ever be content with what he had got. More! more! cried Margery's Travers nature. Love and Fame! and she knew not how she could have both, and was very sorrowful.

CHAPTER III.

BYGONES.

SHE had led a strange sad life, this girl, whom many men at the first glance might have taken for an Empress, but whom very few would have pronounced, with any confidence, a lady. Dick Travers had lived by his wits in various capitals of Europe, he had frequented gambling places, and fared badly at times. When he fared badly his daughter fared worse, she had often dined off only bread and figs; she did not recollect when she had first left an hotel at the request of the landlord. It was an experience of life that had at one

time been very familiar to her. But the landlords had mostly bowed low before her, as she had done so, treating her with the respect her appearance seemed to demand. Even as a child Margery had walked with her head thrown back, and her shoulders set.

Her father was handsome also, but his were not the kind of looks that command respect. The Travers had always been a handsome race; in olden days they had won the love of beautiful princesses, and sometimes ended by marrying their plain but rich ladies in waiting. It had indeed at times been very necessary for the Travers to marry rich wives; so necessary that it would have been quite unfitting, and altogether beneath a Travers, who always did a thing thoroughly whilst he was about it, to have considered anything else but the wealth of his intended bride.

The younger brothers had sometimes failed in their attempts upon money-bags, but the head of the house had always righted himself somehow, till at last one Travers threw himself away thoroughly, as they did everything, and married a beautiful milkmaid without a penny, who bore him a son and heir in lawful wedlock, just as he was about to lead to the altar the daughter of the richest nabob then in existence. That Travers blew his brains out. "The best thing he could do, under the circumstances," as most of his chosen friends agreed, when they talked it over in the intervals of whist.

But though the estate had done all that land could do during the long ensuing minority, yet since this melancholy catastrophe the Travers had never quite regained their pristine splendour, and had, at the same time, become a little wilder, if

that were possible. Not but that, in the old days, there had been a story of a Travers who had been ready to sell his soul to the devil for gold, only, as soon as he found he could get unlimited money in that way, he began to wish for something more, as was the Travers' wont.

"Stop a little," cried he, "there's no such hurry for the money, now I know it is coming. Before I sell my soul, I would see Him who bought it long ago with His own blood. You can paint, I suppose, cannot you? Can you paint me a picture of the Son of God dying for men?"

"Better than any mortal hand," replied the demon, "for I was an eye-witness."

"Paint me the picture, then," cried this Travers. He was a younger son, of course. Younger sons generally are the boldest and readiest to risk their chances. "When you hand me over the picture we'll com-

plete our bargain. You're to have my soul, and I a bottomless purse."

"Agreed," cried the demon.

But when he returned with the picture, he saw he had overreached himself, as the devil so often did in the Middle Ages—he seems to have grown older and wiser since then. For no sooner did the young man see the picture than he smote upon his breast, and durst no more look up, but abased himself in the dust, crossing himself as he had never crossed himself before —that is to say, with heart and soul. And as he crossed himself, the demon flew away affrighted, and the demon's money-bags changed into sharp flints, across which the young man walked with bleeding feet to the nearest monastery. For an angel had laid hold of the picture, and the angel went before. Some say it was not an angel really, but the spirit of the young man's

first love, whom he had wronged cruelly, and who had died that day at noon. Anyhow, by spiritual hands the picture was hung up over an altar of the chapel, and in the chapel for many and many a year that Travers prayed many prayers, and shed many tears, till at last, in mercy, his now purified soul was released from the body burdened by the many infirmities a reckless youth had brought upon it.

Some people said, if the proper measures had been taken, that Travers might have been canonized, or at least beatified; but he was the only one of the name who could ever have laid claim to such honours, and the rest of the family thought nothing of them, so the proper measures were never taken. Only the daughters of the house looked back sometimes with emotion to the Travers who had become a monk, for the daughters have many bitter moments,

where the men follow their own wilful way, *coute que coute.* But nothing stopped the Travers; they spent money as long as they had any, and borrowed it when they had none, and ran away with their neighbours' wives, and killed those who made love to their own, and gradually died out as a family, till at last Dick Travers was left the sole male representative.

At seventeen he was as handsome as any of his ancestors, but at twenty he had already begun to be gouty, and was, besides, sufficiently in love with an Italian singer to end by marrying her, ruining all his prospects by so doing. His affection for her had hardly time to diminish, but it never led him afterwards to attempt one single effort to make her life other than a misery to her. She worked herself almost to death to earn money for him, and he spent the money thus earned upon pleas-

ures that made life a bitterness to her. Then Margery was born, and became the most beautiful child that ever mother doted upon.

One evening Dick Travers came home, and said, in his pleasant, easy-going way, that he had been talking to an impresario of his acquaintance about taking the child to train as a figurante, and in the meanwhile to be useful in dumb show.

"She has got it in her to make her way," said the young father of five-and-twenty, tossing back the love-locks from his heated forehead. "And three mouths to feed are a heavy tax upon a man without a profession."

He had sold out soon after his marriage, and since then billiards had been his only ostensible means of earning a livelihood. At the card-table his losses more than equalled his gains, but at billiards the

Travers stroke had long been known. If they would only have confined themselves to billiards! But their present representative stood hard to lose their fame even in this line; *petits verres* may steady a man's hand up to a certain point, but after that they are well known to have the opposite effect.

Dick Travers had been drinking already, and he had never felt any particular respect for his wife, who had been first a peasant, then a singer, but he was sobered at once now, as she rose up from the piano, where she had been practising her part, and turned round upon him.

"What did you say?" she cried. Then, as he hesitated and looked confused—"Three mouths to feed! Trust that to me—I know a way! and if you ever dare touch one hair of my child's head, or disgrace her by apprenticing her to any theatre or opera, to sing, or to dance, or

to act, recollect my curse will be upon you both in this world and the next, and it will go hard with you, Ricardo. Three mouths to feed, indeed!"

"I see no disputing that fact, and it strikes me it will soon be four," said Dick Travers, stretching out one arm to pass it round her waist, and draw her towards him.

Italian beauty fades fast, and for this year past she had cried herself to sleep most nights that she had slept; but five years ago she had been very lovely, not to speak of the charms of her singing, and her husband had observed her so little, he had barely noticed a change since then. He rather liked to see her in a rage, and he was quite fond of her still, in the way some utterly selfish men are fond of women, fall in love with them, and marry them, and bury them, all the while quite

fond of them, and as fond of themselves as ever. But the woman drew back with a gesture of horror, as if even her garments would be defiled by any touch of his. She went and bent over the cot where the unconscious Margery was sleeping, and, mother though she was, woke her by the violence of her sobs and kisses. Then Margery cried also, and Dick Travers swore an oath or two, and went out. He had not settled matters with the impresario, and he determined to be off with him now, for the present, at least.

There were times, he believed, when it was dangerous to oppose women; certainly he had never seen his wife in such a rage before. Well, he would keep out of the way for the present. That is always such a pleasant, easy-going thing to do, when matters are not going quite right at home, and, of course, the man on whom three

mouths were such a heavy tax, never once thought how it might be faring with the two others, as he drank and gambled away the money he had taken from his wife, till one day he had spent his uttermost penny, and then he thought he would go home, and see if she were in a better temper.

There was an air of confusion about the house as he entered it; no one was in the sitting-room. He pushed open the bedroom door; there was a little crowd of people, and a priest holding a crucifix to some one's lips. It was pushed away suddenly, and his wife sat upright for a moment, laying her hand on her little daughter's head. "Ricardo, remember!" she cried, and with a convulsive rattle in the throat she fell back dead.

People said she had died in child-birth, Dick Travers let them say it; but he never said so himself. After all he was only

twenty-five, and not quite hardened yet. His wife's death overcame him so much that he could not even attend her funeral. He and his young motherless child sat at home alone together, while the beautiful young singer was buried and forgotten. But not quite forgotten yet.

"Where is *la madre?* Where is *mamma mia?*" asked a childish voice. "If she has gone to Heaven, may not I go too? Now at once?" and the Travers impetuosity showed itself in the stamp of the foot and the toss of the beautiful young head.

"You have got to stay with Pappa. Poor Pappa, who is all alone now."

Even at four years old, or rather because she was only four, the child looked round with a scornful curl of the lip.

"There are many *belle donne* for Pappa, and he can go out and amuse himself. *La madre* cannot be happy without me, and

she would cry to think I was left with Pappa. I *must* go to mamma—I *must*—I *must.*"

Some children might have said I will, but Margery Travers wished it with such intensity, she felt she *must.* Dick Travers tried to explain to her that her mother was dead; but the child only got angry; she thought he was making up tales to deceive her.

"Am I dead?" she asked, scornfully. "Are you dead? Then why is *la madre* dead—*la madre* out of all the world? It is all *bugie* what you like to tell to make *la madre* cry. But I do not believe you, not one word," and the child stopped her ears, and sat down by the window to watch, confident that her mother would come back soon.

Dick Travers was quite cut up, more cut up than he had ever been in his life before.

The child was such a beautiful child, he would have liked to have felt her little arms about his neck, and her baby tones bidding him not to cry. He felt hurt that his child would not love him. He could not help thinking also of his wife's last words, and that she knew a *way*. What had she done while he had been absent? Certainly she had taken the most effectual means to prevent his giving over their child to be a figurante. He would not have done it to save his life now. For a few years he tried to pass for a reformed character, gave up drinking to a certain extent, and played billiards almost exclusively, thus earning what might almost be called a regular income, but this could not of course last for ever.

During these years, however, Margery grew up, for a girl of twelve in Italy might almost pass for a girl of sixteen in England.

Not that she lived in Italy always; sometimes there were trips to Baden Baden, Wiesbaden, etc. At fourteen Margery was well acquainted with most of the gambling resorts in Europe, but she had never been allowed to play. In truth she never wished to do so, it all looked very grave and tiresome; but sometimes some man her father knew would win, and then he would bring her a bonbonnière, or take her to some shop to choose what she liked best. The same man seldom did this twice, for Margery had very splendid tastes, and invariably selected the most expensive articles.

Dick Travers cared for his daughter in a way, he was proud of her beauty and her spirit. Had she been plain, he would probably have abandoned her as a waif and stray on the ocean of life. But her beauty attracted men, who lost their money

freely to him for a time; thus Margery was a convenience to her father, whilst to him the girl owed the bitterest moments of her life. All accustomed though she was, she could never overcome her shame at seeing him intoxicated, her disgust at his coarse jokes. Sometimes he would tell her to kiss him; he never ventured to do this but when several of his boon companions were round him. Then she dared not refuse him, lest worse should betide her, but the kiss was so cold a one, hardly any man could covet it.

Once, however, one more drunken than the others, or who perhaps had not seen the expression with which she had bent over her father, proposed that she should give them a kiss all round, and stood up to claim his first.

"Father, knock him down, or I will do it myself," said the girl, not supplicatingly,

but imperiously, and without for a moment moving her flashing eyes off the man who was advancing towards her, as if she would cow him with her glance. Only the man sitting behind her saw that her hand was on a dagger, which seemed to have been somewhere concealed within the folds of her skirts.

He rose from his seat, and leaning over her knocked the other down for her. Not by word or sign did Margery thank him, as she walked away with a stony expression upon her face. Her father had not moved to help her; she could hear his light careless laugh behind her—

"Curse the girl's pride. She will ruin all her chances, if she goes on in this way. She did not even thank you, when you came to her assistance so chivalrously, did she, my Lord?"

"No," answered a harsh voice that

Margery guessed to be that of a rich English Lord of whom she had heard people talking. She supposed it was he who had helped her, but she knew also there would be a duel next morning, and that she should be the talk of the bath. What business had a man rich and noble to keep such bad company? He need not expect her to thank him, if he did. But when she heard he had been rather seriously wounded she felt a sort of despair at her ingratitude, for, after all, he had saved her from an attempt at murder at least. She had meant to kill that man, if he had come nearer to her.

In truth the duel had been of the tamest description, and her father had only told her of the wounds to work upon her compassion. When she showed none he gave it up as a bad job. He was always looking out for possible and impossible sons-in-law,

who might set him on his legs again, and an English Peer would have suited him exactly. However, Margery never seemed to consider this, and perhaps an English Peer was hardly within her reach.

CHAPTER IV.

HER DEAD FATHER.

THE Travers moved on to Florence, and there Margery came across the before-mentioned Art student. She had a little time on her hands then, for a German Prince had been laying siege to her heart, and her father was bent on her accepting him, even if nothing better than a morganatic marriage could be accomplished in the first instance, for the Prince was royal, and the eldest son. He had made grand preparations for a picnic, at which he was to win the hand, if not the love, of a more beautiful woman than had ever visited his

dreams before, when suddenly he became indisposed. The picnic was put off for a day or two, and Dick Travers relaxed his guard upon his daughter. At breakfast a young man looked hard at Margery. She was not unconscious of his gaze, she was even thinking to herself, "How strange that he should be just like all the others! He does not look as if he were, but of course he is!"

Dick Travers walked round the table, and then slapped his leg with delight.

"By Jove! Madge, child, if he is not taking a sketch of you under the table! I thought as much. Make her give you a sitting, sir, she is worth it, and I daresay she'll do it, if you ask her. Why, bless me, she has sat as a hundred things, haven't you, Madge?"

The artist had coloured crimson, he looked beseechingly across the table at

Margery. "I know I have been guilty of a great impertinence. I do not know how to apologise. But I thought even the merest sketch might be so valuable, and——"

"Don't apologise," interrupted Dick Travers, "it is a bad plan, if you want to get on in life." He was himself so particularly calculated to advise people on that matter. "There's a shady balcony there, and there's my daughter. If you want to sell the portrait, I know some one who'd like to buy it. I'm off to his Serene Highness, Madge, to see how he is, and win a little money. He is a deuced bad ecarté player. Any messages from you? What, not even your love? Oh! trust me, I'll take him a kiss or two, and tell him how red you got when I named it. Girls! girls! what funny creatures they are, always pretending not to like what they are longing for all the

time! There, sit to that young artist now, you've got your occupation for the day, do you hear?"

As Dick Travers left the room, the young man turned to her with eyes that seemed almost to have tears in them. "Pray do not sit to me, if it is in any way distasteful to yourself. Delightful beyond words though it would be to me, yet——"

"You said a sketch would be valuable to you," said the girl, speaking so coldly as almost to freeze him. "In what character would you like me to sit?"

"As yourself. Will you not?" said he, looking up embarrassed, and at once conscious of his want of skill.

"What! in this old dress? My father would never have consented if he had thought of that. But, in that case, I will fetch my work. You can paint me working, as well as sitting idle. I have been

learning to spin lately. With a distaff it will do very well. Why should you not paint me as Fate?"

"I thought Fate was old," said the young man.

"Born old?" asked the girl.

"No, perhaps not born old."

"Fate cannot alter."

"I will try to paint you as Fate, if you wish. But I am afraid I shall not know how to manage."

"I will arrange it," said Margery, and moved quickly away, and came back with the distaff, and seated herself in the shady balcony. Her old dark brown dress stood out but little against the wall background; she laid a dagger on the ledge before her, and began to spin, with her eyes wide open, looking far into the distance, her lips tight pressed together.

"You paralyse me!" cried the artist, in

a tone of such pain that she turned round and looked at him. He was white, and the perspiration was standing in beads upon his brow. "Who are you that are so unutterably beautiful, and yet so awful?"

"Madge Travers," replied the girl—"Dick Travers' daughter. You will never hear me spoken of in any other way. Do you know what I was thinking of just now, when you said I looked so awful? I was thinking of the life that lay before you, and how little you knew about it, and how it would only the more surely come because of that, and all your life would be marred before you knew anything was going wrong. It is an awful thing to think of. But I will tell you why I wanted you to paint me as Fate—because I knew then the Hereditary Prince would never buy it. He is a coward before a serious

thought, as some men are before a sword. If you will promise not to sell your first sketch of me here, I will sit to you as anything you like."

The last thing he wished to do with it was to sell it at once, he said. He hoped to make a great picture of it some day. Then he asked, somewhat timidly, somewhat puzzled, why she thought such an awful future lay in store for him! Margery replied, in those terrible words of Leopardi, alas! too familiar to the youth of Italy, "*Al gener nostro il Fato, non donò che il morire.*" Then she added—

"I said I would sit to you, but that has nothing to do with talking."

However, the young man was waiting at Florence with a last fond hope that, all disinherited though he was, his mother might yet write to him to take off the curse which weighed heavily upon him,

for all his devotion to Art. So, during three Summer days that the Hereditary Prince yet remained indisposed, Margery sat for long Summer hours to him, and in the end they talked much together, the girl always bitter and despairing, the young man quivering under her profound contempt for all men and things, yet hopeful, ardent about Art and Life.

The last evening they were still lingering talking together, when Margery distinguished the Prince coming towards them on her father's arm through the quick darkening shadow of an Italian evening.

"Go!" she cried, "take your things with you—go at once!" and to cover his retreat, herself advanced to meet her father and his companion.

The artist gathered up his painting things and disappeared, ready to do any-

thing for her sake, but unable to resist lingering for a moment behind a dark recess.

"Well, what has become of that artist fellow? The Prince has come round to see your portrait. Something grand, I should think, after all these sittings."

"He is gone."

"Ah, that I could paint!" sighed the Prince.

Hitherto the conversation had been carried on in Italian, which all three could talk, but at once now Margery answered the Prince in German, of which her father could understand nothing.

"Surely the Arts should not be made playthings. And for you, whose whole time can hardly suffice to study what is for the good of your people, and how best to relieve them from the burden of vexatious imposts that keeps them so behind the rest of Germany,

I should think such a soul-absorbing pursuit would be as unfitting as to waste money at the gambling-table. Do you not agree with me?"

She was herself unaware how much of her speech was inspired by the discourse of the young man who had just left her. Of course it was not to be taken for granted that Margery knew that the Prince had been playing high of late, and was already considerably embarrassed by his losses. But he looked confused, as he hastened to reply,

"Such beautiful lips would convince of anything."

"Did you require to be convinced?" asked Margery, speaking quickly now. Her father had left them alone together, going himself to the other end of the balcony, thus forcing the artist to retire. They were leaning over the low parapet of

the balcony, looking out on to the beautiful view over which night was quickly drawing one dark veil over another, so that in a minute or two it would be blotted from their gaze. "It seems to me," she went on, "that one station is so different from another that what in one would be a virtue would be in another a vice. For that young man to devote all his energies to painting seems excellent; for me to become a singer is equally suitable; whilst you, a Prince, have necessarily, in every little action, as in every great one, to remember that your words and actions are observed, and probably imitated. You must not even marry to please yourself. However, that is not more than that a poor artist may not look for a princess for his bride. Each must choose out of his own sphere, or he will not find a proper helpmate for him. You have chosen to say that my lips convince

you; it was a passing compliment, of course. Only, since you have paid it to me, let me persuade you that it would be more princely and more noble to try to perform some one of the many duties that fall to your lot in life, rather than to lead —such a life as my father leads," said the girl, sorrowfully, but very simply; then added, calmly, "and with the knowledge that you are serving as an instrument of torture to a girl whom you never *ought* to marry. Not that you probably think of doing that."

She was leaving him, when there was something in the tone with which he bade her stop that almost forced her to obey him.

"Wait," he said. "You have spoken. Now hear me." Margery made an impatient movement. "Nay, fear no loving protestations," he said, commandingly. As

he spoke she realized that he was royal. There had been nothing in him to remind her of it before. "You have spoken of me as an instrument of torture. Had you, or anyone, ever hinted anything of the kind to me before, I would have left Florence that moment. You have spoken doubtfully of my wish to marry you. I do not say you insult yourself by doing so, because my heart bleeds too deeply with pity for you. But from the first moment I loved you I never thought of making you anything but my wife, and my Hereditary Princess. I know your father would have been satisfied with less, but I should not have been. Now I await your orders. Shall I leave Florence to-morrow, or when? In either case, remember, you can swear to your father that I never offered to you."

"You speak royally now, will you not act so?" said the girl.

"How so?" replied the Prince.

"Stay and neglect me," said Margery. "You know my father would never believe me, if you went away now, and though true in words, it would not be true in spirit. Indeed, the nobility with which you have not offered has made me almost regret—I should have thought that an impossibility a few moments ago."

She had raised her arm, and was pressing her hand to her forehead. He sprang forward.

"No, you promised I was to hear no words of love. There is only one thing I wanted to ask you," she added, very humbly, "one favour. Will you grant it? On your honour as a Prince you promise?"

"On my honour as a Prince I promise," said the young man, devoutly.

"These jewels you have given me," said Margery, drawing a little packet from her

pocket, "they are so valuable as to be almost dangerous for me to carry. I want you to take them back. I was obliged to accept them," she added, pleadingly, "you gave them always in my father's presence. I meant somehow to have contrived to send them back to you before you went. But now you have promised, and I can give them into your own hands without anyone else knowing anything about them. And now, as a souvenir, if you will allow me, I will keep this little decoration. You said the ladies of your country sometimes wore it."

She had herself to stuff the jewels into his pocket, for the young man had broken down altogether now, and was sobbing like a child, his face covered with his hands.

Next day he was naturally much more ill, and as soon as he got well enough to

be moved, Margery had the satisfaction of hearing that he was travelling homewards. She kept the little decoration, and sometimes looked at it, but she never wore it. Her father stormed at her, and asked if she thought she owed him no duties as a daughter.

"When I bring you the most brilliant *partis* in Europe, you let them slip through your fingers like so much water. It is nothing to you whether I starve or beg my bread."

"I am sure that I could get money for you as an actress," Margery replied. "I had hoped to be a singer, but my voice has gone. So I should like to be an actress."

Her father rammed his hat down on his head, and stared at her.

"Never whilst I live!" he cried, and hurried from the room.

Margery wondered what he could see to object to in her suggestion; she had never seen him look so startled before. When, in the end, he died suddenly, she could not affect a grief she did not feel, but she was overwhelmed by her first close proximity to death, overwhelmed by the sense of utter loneliness, overwhelmed by the consciousness that her father had spent his last Napoleon on the drunken revel that had hastened his end, and that she had no idea how to get more money.

It was then that Allan Stapleton came forward. He had sat next her once at the *table d'hôte*, and though, in his shyness, sitting thus close beside her, he had hardly dared to look enough at her to see how beautiful she was, yet he had overheard her father using decidedly bad language to her in English, because she was so proud, she let no man come near her.

The rest of the *table d'hôte* were foreign, but almost before Margery had had time to answer, Allan Stapleton called, in clear, incisive, unmistakeably English tones,

"Waiter, another glass, please."

Dick Travers glowered round Margery to see who this Englishman was, then gave her a little push, as he whispered,

"I suppose you won't talk to him either now?"

"No, father," replied Margery.

Neither speech was lost upon Allan, who grew as red as a poppy, and only ventured to hand the *menu*, when it was pushed round, in a back-handed fashion, glancing over his other shoulder as he did so.

He started when Margery, in her deep, clear voice, said a perfectly audible, "Thank you;" but before he had looked round, she was engaged in explaining its contents to her father, whose eye-sight was already

hazy, and she let Allan see no more than the turn of her neck during the rest of dinner. A few days afterwards he was told that she was left an orphan, and, as the waiter added, with a shrug of his shoulders, he believed penniless. Of course, she would have to leave the hotel immediately, and he wondered what would become of her. As a fellow-countryman in a foreign land, Allan sent up to ask leave for an interview. It was granted, and by the side of her dead father Allan first spoke with Margery Travers. She was very pale, very calm, very proud. She would not even accept his proffered hand, but affected not to see it. When he claimed his right as her fellow-countryman to make all arrangements for her, she hesitated for a moment. Then, looking him full in the face with her large, tearless grey eyes,

"I have no money," she said.

Allan was rather embarrassed, for he was not particularly over-burdened with money himself at the moment, returning from a foreign tour, in which he had spent at least twice as much as he had intended; still he said, with as good a grace as he could,

"Allow me, at least, to lend you enough for your immediate necessities," and taking a couple of bank-notes from his pocket, offered them to her.

Margery unfolded them, and looked at them. After a few moments' consideration she said,

"One of these will be enough for me. I will write you an acknowledgment," and without even thanking him she got up to look for pen and paper. If he had only known how much it cost her to accept his aid, he would have forgiven her. As it was, he was a little offended, and looked

at her acknowledgment as if it were a curiosity, rather than a thing of value. Margery's colour rose. "When would you require to be repaid, and to what address?" she asked.

If she had been arranging a transaction with a professional money-lender, her manner could not have been more unemotional. All Allan's little speeches of condolence faded out of his head, and he began to think she would next inquire what interest he expected to receive.

He gave her a card, and said it did not matter at all when the money was repaid.

"Will any day within the next six months do?" asked Margery, anxiously.

Allan Stapleton longed to beg her never to think of repaying him, as he saw the wistful expression in her eyes; but he feared giving her pain.

She unfolded the bank-note, and looked

at it again, as if it were a friend, her eyes filling with tears now.

"I did not think there was anyone in all the world who would *lend* me money," she said, naïvely.

After that Allan arranged everything for her, and when he found that she was determined on going to live in England, and yet had no friends there, he gave her the address of a former servant at the Priory, who now let lodgings in London, and whom, he said, he was sure she would find kind, though he was sorry to say he knew nothing of her rooms.

"Are they respectable?" asked Margery.

"Yes—yes; certainly," replied Allan, in great confusion. "That is, I don't know quite what you mean. They are not at all fashionable, certainly, for I have not the slightest idea where the place is. But Mrs. Jones is a most worthy old soul."

"Are they cheap?" asked Margery.

Allan—who never could manage to live within an allowance of £400 a year, who was rather shy of being seen out of May-fair, and felt as if he were sending poor Margery to an *ultima Thule* indeed, in directing her to a very northern district, in consideration for her purse—here became confused again, for he thought the girl's notions of cheapness and his own might be very different. She had already spoken sadly of the dearness of the hotel, whereas he thought it the very cheapest place he had ever put up at.

"Well, yes, I should think so," said he. "If not, Mrs. Jones will be much better able to help you to find cheaper ones than I am, and I am sure you may rely upon her in every way. But you have some money to live upon, haven't you?" he asked, very shyly.

"Yes, I shall have *quite* enough to live upon, when I get it," said Margery, "but I cannot get any till I arrive in England."

Allan longed to offer her more, he thought her very poorly provided for the journey, and it distressed him to find her choosing a slow train to travel by on account of its cheapness. But he was more frightened of offering to lend this girl money than he should have been of borrowing from anyone else. However, as he travelled express, and necessarily arrived in England first, he could do one thing for her—he found out Mrs. Jones's lodgings, and, somehow leaving upon that worthy woman's mind the impression that a dying friend of his abroad had bequeathed his only daughter to his care, making him sole executor, guardian, &c., easily obtained a promise from her to keep her dining-rooms vacant, and do everything she could to

make the "poor dear young lady" comfortable, when she arrived. And as Margery, worn out by her long and wearisome journey, in the first instance threw herself upon the little horse-hair sofa, and burst into tears, refusing tea and toast, and everything, Mrs. Jones only found out by degrees how beautiful she was, and had grown so fond of her by dint of trying to comfort her, before she did so, that she took it as the most natural thing in the world that Mr. Allan should be calling inquiring after her, and anxious to help her about business in any way he could.

Thus Margery settled down into London lodgings, and by degrees discovered that she had £100 a year to live upon, and how much that was. She took some time to discover this last part, being all unaccustomed to fixed sums; but from the first she had determined to allow herself no

luxuries, but a piano and a subscription to a library, and, for the rest, she was ready to live upon bread and water, if only she could live respectably. "Like other people," she said, with a pathetic quiver of the lips. She had realized that for generations back no Travers had done that, and it seemed to her the hardest thing in all the world, and the one thing worth doing. To her it seemed as if it would be easy, in comparison, to make a figure in the world. For brief periods she had already, once or twice, been a shining light in very brilliant circles.

But she did not covet anything of this now. She wished only to be respectable, and *like other people.* Poor Margery! she went to church once every Sunday, and even paid for a sitting out of her small means, all with this idea of being thought worthy of the respect of other people. It was a poor motive, and it was sad that

going to church led her to nothing higher. But the energetic curate was forced to concentrate his morning energies upon the music, which he consequently made as elaborate and uncongregational as possible, while the incumbent delivered, in lieu of sermons, very finished, æsthetic effusions, which would not have been out of place in Athens before an "altar to the Unknown God."

Margery was already accustomed to paying no attention to the words of the service from frequent attendance in Roman Catholic churches; her chief idea now during the prayers was to try to imitate the utterly placid, meaningless expressions of those about her. There was an air of respectability about them, she thought, at all events, something quite different from the air of the frequenters of gambling saloons and opera-houses, where people generally wore an expression of being

somewhat more in earnest and determined. The sermon often alluded to some philosophical work, which Margaret not rarely afterwards ordered at the library. Certainly philosophical works are well adapted for developing the reasoning powers, but their tendency of late is not seldom anti-religious, sometimes even anti-moral.

Margery, however, would not read books of the latter description. She would not even dip into the question as to the Subjection of Women, being decidedly of the opinion that marriages, as now arranged, were respectable, and so long as marriage was that, she did not care what else it might be—only, of course, it must be with a man who was himself respectable. Thus going to church never led her beyond her original aim in going there, nor in any way raised her standard. Her one fixed principle was that respectable people did not owe money.

When Allan Stapleton came to see if he could be of further service to her, the recollection of that borrowed bank-note came between them like a shadow, and she was barely civil to him, certainly not grateful.

At last the day came when she returned it to him. Poor Allan was greatly distressed. He had long ere this gained even an exaggerated idea of the smallness of her means, and he felt himself so superior to money cares with the consciousness of a long bill at his tailor's, and of the beautiful thoroughbred that was being walked up and down outside the barred entrance to Margery's little No Thoroughfare. He grew red all over, and crumpled the note she had given him rather nervously.

"Will you not give me back my acknowledgment?" asked Margery, anxiously.

Then, as she received the slip of paper back into her hands again—Allan himself only then realised that he had always carried it about with him ever since she had given it to him—she tore it into little bits, and threw it from the window. "That is the first money I have ever borrowed," she said. "Do you think I shall ever borrow any more? Respectable people do not borrow money, do they?"

"They must be very scarce, then," said Allan, laughing. "I am afraid I don't know any."

From that moment the shadow passed away from between them, and Margery became frank and simple as a peasant girl. As he went away that day, she said, shyly,

"Thank you for all you have done for me. I have been so afraid you would not take back the money you lent me. I have been so afraid you might refuse it, and, do

you know, I think it would have broken my heart if you had?"

"Then I am very glad I didn't," said Allan, devoutly.

"You see," said Margery, looking at him ingenuously, "many men might have given me money. Many men have lent my father money, and never asked for it back. But very few men—perhaps no one but you—would have taken it back as you did just now, as if you had always expected to have it. Of course you didn't—of course you did not really expect ever to see it again; but I am so much obliged to you for seeming to do so. That makes me grateful for all you have done for me before. I could not be grateful for it till now, because—because you had lent me money."

The explanation was not very lucid, but it sufficed for the occasion, and now

rather more than a month had passed away since then, and Allan had been several times to see her, and she had promised to be his wife, and was expecting his first love-letter. She had thrown other love-letters into the fire unopened, but this one she meant to read; and now there was the postman coming like Cupid, and Margery, who had watched his movements with a blush and a sigh ever since Allan went away, now with a blush and a smile received his letter, and stopped twice to kiss it before daring to open it.

"How he loves me!" she murmured, smiling a little sadly, as she folded the letter together again. Then yet more sadly, "I might have loved some one like that. But, of course, that was not for me."

The eyebrows were drawn close together, and made a hard, straight line above

the eyes flashing beneath them like a sword half concealed within a scabbard. She tried to put the thought away from her, and opened out Allan's letter to read again. It made her very sad again, sadder than she had been for a long time. She went to the piano, and steadily sang hymns all the rest of the evening. Hymns were to her mind very respectable, and a safeguard against all evil, especially when sung to those Anglican tunes that had to her ear no melody at all. At last she went to bed. She kissed Allan's letter then, and fell asleep with her cheek pillowed upon it. The hymns seemed to have done her good.

CHAPTER V.

THE STAPLETONS' WAY.

THE Stapletons were a family who took things very easily so long as they each had what they wanted. Lady Stapleton had adopted the family tone quite naturally upon her marriage, and objected to nothing so long as she was not expected to exert herself in any way. She had been a very lovely, languishing beauty when Sir James, then a younger brother, had persuaded her to run away with him. He had been in love with her for some time, and she with him, as much as such a fair, gentle creature could be in love with

anyone. One day at a garden-party he had conducted her to a little secluded gate, handed her into a carriage waiting outside, and stepped into it after her himself. Not for some minutes did she realise that the horses were full trot for Scotland.

"James," she then cried, with more determination than he had ever heard in her voice before, "this will be very uncomfortable for everyone, will it not? I must ask you to take me back at once."

"Not the least uncomfortable, my heart's darling," he replied, "lean against me, and you could not find a softer, tenderer cushion in all Christendom. Now are you not comfortable, sweetheart?" and he stopped her mouth with kisses.

According to all the young girl's knowledge of life, kisses and a carriage and four necessarily led to marriage. Besides, whenever she had dreamt of a husband,

it was James Stapleton who had figured in that character.

"It is not I that am uncomfortable," she said; "but I seem to hear my aunt's screams, and what will my poor father say?"

"'Bless you, my children,' just as you've heard it at the play a dozen times, my dearest, dearest, darling Maria."

"Then you're sure it is all for the best, James?"

"Nothing could be more for the best, my darling! I don't see a thing to find fault with myself."

"Neither do I," said the girl. "For they always said I must marry, and I couldn't marry anyone but you, you know. So this is the simplest way."

"Of course it is," said he, and thought her the loveliest, dearest girl, just as ever afterwards he had thought her the loveliest,

dearest wife. She would not have suited some men, but she suited him exactly, and as his elder brother died soon after, the reconciliation scene came about quicker than even the sanguine young man himself had anticipated.

Since that, Sir James had lived at the Priory, and become master of the fox-hounds, the next dearest wish of his heart after that of winning his wife. And ever since then Lady Stapleton had been subject to headaches, and her beauty had rather faded. But of course it never occurred to the rather boisterous Sir James, when he came home from "the best day's run ever seen," and went to claim a kiss from his darling wife, before brushing the mud off even, that the darkened room and the Eau-de-Cologne on her forehead were at all owing to anxiety on his account. She always gave him the expected caress, and

listened without interrupting him to every detail of the run, if he had time to give it to her before dinner, and then caressed him again, stroking his rough, weather-beaten face with her soft, silky hand, as she said,

"Dear! dear! how tired you must be!"

When other people remarked upon the coincidence between hunting days and headaches, Lady Stapleton would reply, a little languidly,

"It is what James likes, and he does not know it makes me nervous. The doctor said I should get over it."

Whether, as years passed on, she did or did not, no one knew; for she got into a habit of lying on the sofa in her own room on most days, and only driving out occasionally in a very easy carriage. Everyone treated her like an invalid, and to the world in general she became a nonentity. Only her husband and her son loved her

with a chivalrous affection. They both liked to feel sure of never meeting anything more reproachful from her than a slightly tenderer caress than usual. Allan of course hunted with his father. Una was not allowed to do so. Sir James was too keen a huntsman not to object to ladies in the field, besides, his idea of women was that they should all be gentle, and like his wife, in whose presence all men, himself included, unconsciously lowered their tones, and weakened the force of their phraseology.

Una therefore rode home from the meets, accompanied by a groom, and wandered about the grounds in the society of Mademoiselle, as Sir James always called her, and learnt a great deal more of life in this way than ever Allan did with his Eton and Oxford curriculum. She had taken command of the Priory at a very early age,

and poor Lady Stapleton had already for some time felt it as much as her place on the sofa was worth to interfere with her daughter's bills of fare and floral decorations, when Una, on attaining seventeen, announced, one day, that she thought she ought to be introduced into society next season. Lady Stapleton sighed.

"A town house would be a great trouble!"

"Not to you, you darling," said Una. "I have heard of one that will suit us exactly, and I shall, of course, make all the necessary arrangements. By-the-way, Mademoiselle Dulau has secured a very good French maid for me, she says. Of course, it is absolutely necessary that I should have a Parisian, for fear of losing the accent, and now that I am coming out, she will be all the more useful to me."

"So the little puss has arranged it all,

has she?" said Sir James, when he heard about it. "It will cost a deuced lot of money, you know, Una."

Sir James was decidedly not so fond of Una as he was of Allan, who was his companion in the hunting-field, but he was proud of his daughter's good looks, and all the prouder, perhaps, because she was so tiny, she looked almost as if one could blow her away. That was decidedly feminine in his eyes.

"Perhaps I'll pay it back to you some day, if you find a rich enough husband for me," said Una, coolly.

The speech jarred so much on her father's ears that he would have gone to Jericho rather than have discussed the subject any more. So Una carried her point, Parisian maid and all; and as Lady Stapleton was only occasionally equal to the fatigue of chaperoning her, Una went

out generally under the protection of that careless aunt, from beneath whose very wing Lady Stapleton herself had eloped some twenty years ago. At first she danced, just as any *débutante* dances, with any man that asks her, and many men asked Una Stapleton, for it was hardly flattery to call her figure sylph-like, and men liked her little innocent face, with its pretty pink colour, and eyes that were usually so demurely hid beneath her eyelids. They looked up sometimes, but the men who danced with her had, as a rule, no idea how much they saw when they did so.

Una rather exaggerated the usual *débutante's* anxiety about her flounces; she generally wore white, gossamer sort of dresses, and played to perfection the part of a young *ingénue* in a French novel.

Gradually it began to be observed that

she always danced one dance at least with Randal Tollemache, one of the fastest officers in about the fastest regiment of Her Majesty's Household Brigade. In fact, fast was hardly the word to apply to Randal. He bore a bad character among his brother officers, though a good many of them admired the prowess he had shown in war, and rather tried to copy his dare-devil air—quite unsuccesfully, however. Not another man could gnaw his moustache like Randal, or ever dared use quite such bad language—under his breath, of course—in the presence of ladies. His length of limb was remarkable; his walk alone ought to have stamped him for a bandit, and his manners were not rarely unbearably rude. But as an athlete Randal was redoubtable; he had also somehow established for himself the character of only dancing with the most admired wo-

men of the season, and this to such an extent that now to dance with Randal Tollemache was to be among the most admired. Not only that, it gave a certain character to his partners.

Some subjects were not so freely discussed then as now, and Randal generally chose young married women to distinguish by his patronage.

Una Stapleton, the young *ingénue*, looked so unlike the usual run of his partners that it was some time before people really believed she was one of them. They thought at first it was a chance—a caprice. But it was a very steady caprice. Wherever Una went Randal went also, and when Una danced with others, she left a lovely white and green bouquet in Randal's hands.

Afterwards people who went out much that year always recollected the tall dark

man, standing in a corner gnawing his moustache, holding the white bouquet very carelessly, and scowling either at the innocent-faced Una, or at her partner for the moment. She would come back for her bouquet, exchange a few words with Randal, and then go off again. During those few words that passed between them no one ever saw Una's face, for Randal stood quite back in the corner, and Una stood before him, receiving her bouquet with her back to the room.

One night, when Lady Stapleton had been chaperoning her daughter, she spoke to her on the way home. It is wonderful what audacity mothers will be capable of towards girls of seventeen, who have had the reins of authority given over to them from their very babyhood, because mothers then find it saves trouble. It can hardly be said to save trouble in the end.

"I don't think, Una, it can be for your advantage to make yourself remarkable with that Mr. Tollemache."

"Whoever would remark such a little thing as me?" said Una, cooingly. "I am quite lost in the crowd, and if he were fifty times *that* Mr. Tollemache, I only danced with him once to-night."

"Did you really, now?" said Lady Stapleton, with unaffected surprise. "Do you know, if anyone had asked me, I should have said you had been dancing with him all the evening."

"That shows you were sleepy, you old darling. You must not go to balls any more," said Una, decidedly. "You are not equal to it."

"No, I am not equal to it," said Lady Stapleton, with satisfaction. "Only your father wished me to go to-night. He said something about that Mr. Tollemache, and

his losing a great deal at play. I said you would never marry a man who lost much at play. But your father was uneasy, so I went."

"Very kind of you, I am sure," replied her daughter, with suave politeness.

Then they drove on in silence. Suddenly Lady Stapleton gave a little scream.

"What is it?" asked her daughter.

"Why, Una, I thought I heard you sob, and I never did before."

"And you never will," said the demure *débutante*, all white lace, flounces, and jasmine and white rosebuds.

The next day Sir James was fussing and fuming through the house; he had missed a page from his cheque-book, and he kept it in a desk with a Bramah lock, and it was the one thing he was particular about, and which of the servants could have taken it?

"I can't bear to look on my servants as

thieves," said Sir James, almost crying.

"How can you know that you did not use it yourself?" asked his daughter, indignantly. "How can anyone recollect how many cheques they draw? And you're always losing your keys."

"Not the key of that desk," blubbered Sir James. "It is on my watch chain by day, and under my pillow by night, and no one can get it. But either they've got it, or picked the lock, for I never drew a cheque yet that I didn't make an entry of. It is the one thing I am careful about, and I know that cheque has been stolen, and I shall go down to the bank about it at once."

It was easy to discover everything, and it was all as plain as possible. That cheque had been drawn for £300, and Sir James's signature had been forged to it, the rest was in nobody's hand in particular,

but evidently feigned. When it had been handed into the bank, it had been thought sufficiently suspicious-looking to be shown to the principals. A junior partner had got up, and looked out at the man who had brought it. Though out of livery he had recognized Randal Tollemache's groom.

"Oh! that fellow's going to marry Miss Stapleton," he said, coming back. "I see he has sent his groom round with it, I daresay Sir James is settling some of his debts for him, and he has filled up the cheque himself. Just the kind of fellow to write rather queerly."

When Sir James heard all this, he was more unhappy than before. He had heard a bad account of Randal Tollemache; but this was something quite beyond anything he had imagined possible, and to blast the career of an officer and a gentleman was abhorrent to him. Besides, he more than

half believed his daughter was in love with him. That must be put a stop to at once. It was of no use appealing to "poor Maria," she never had any firmness; besides, she was already quite knocked up with the ball of the night before. No! he must deal with his daughter himself, and Sir James's heart melted within him as he sent for Una to the study. Perhaps she was very much in love with the fellow, and, of course, she would cry, and, oh dear! dear! he wished he had never heard a word about the cheque. But it could not be hushed up now, Sir James had ridden down to the bank with Randal's Colonel, telling him of his difficulties all the way. The Junior Banker was very popular in society, and, of course, the Colonel had heard who was the culprit. And anyhow, whoever was told, Una must be, she must not be in love with the

fellow any more. She had been wandering about dark passages with him a great deal too much at a ball the Stapletons themselves had given not long before. Probably it was then Randal Tollemache had seen the bureau, guessed its contents, and formed the design of picking the lock, and forging the cheque. Poor Sir James! he had been told there were suspicions as to some of Randal's turf transactions; but to be himself the means of bringing to light that the fellow was a common thief, and to have to tell his daughter so! It was terrible! He prepared to be as firm, and yet as tender, as only a very choleric and decidedly rough-mannered man could fancy himself being.

But when Una appeared, a little listless, with a smelling-bottle in one hand, and a fan in another, her father at once felt he could not go up to her and kiss her, as he

had intended to commence by doing. There was something artificial about her that always repelled her father. It was almost more apparent than usual now.

"Una," said he, "you know that cheque I was so uneasy about, that——"

"That you thought you had lost? Yes!" said Una, fanning herself gently, having already applied some scent to her forehead. "I think there must have been something wrong with that ball last night. I feel quite seedy this morning, and as to poor dear mother, she must have been asleep with her eyes open. For she still declares she should have said I danced with Randal Tollemache all the evening."

"It was about that fellow Tollemache I wanted to speak to you, Una."

"About Mr. Tollemache? Why, I thought you said it was about that stupid cheque."

"My dear child, I can't tell you how

sorry I am to grieve you," said her father, his natural kindness getting the better of his unnatural repulsion, and he drew nearer to her, putting one arm round her. Una had dropped fan and smelling-bottle into her lap now, and was looking up thoroughly frightened. Her cheeks were colourless, and there was a gleam in her eyes her father had never seen there before. "But, you see, Una, you've got to forget you ever knew that fellow."

"*Plait-il?*" said Una.

"That cheque was forged," said Sir James, provoked by the French words he did not understand, "and there can be little doubt but that Randal Tollemache forged it."

Una sprang from her seat with a cry of horror. She turned round and fronted her father, her hands clenched, her whole expression, her whole attitude show-

ing she looked upon him as an enemy.

Then Sir James began to enumerate details. He was angry with the girl for flying away from him like that, angry at her staring at him as she did.

At last she laughed scornfully, mockingly.

"So because a man, whom your banker thinks to be Mr. Tollemache's groom out of livery, cashes a cheque you don't remember having put your name to, you accuse a *gentleman* you have had to your house of—of forgery!"

"Una!" cried Sir James, losing his temper.

"Do you intend to tell him to his face what you think of him, or——"

"Confound——" began Sir James, then suddenly stopped. "I am sure I wish I could hush the whole matter up with all my heart. But his Colonel rode down

with me to the bank, and he heard all about it as well as I did. I shan't prosecute—of course I shan't prosecute; but there'll have to be an inquiry, and the fellow will be kicked out of the service. Why, he has not only forged—he must have picked my lock too, like any common burglar."

"And I tell you he didn't!" cried the girl. "I tell you it is a lie every word you say against him. And if you don't manage to hush the matter up, you'll repent it as long as you live."

"Have you gone mad, Una?" thundered Sir James, now beside himself with rage. "Talk to me of lies, indeed! And there's no more possibility of hushing the matter up now than—than——What do you mean by saying I'll repent it? Who'll make me repent it, I should like to know?"

"I will!" cried Una. She had folded

her arms across her chest now, and stood staring at her father.

"You will, you——" and Sir James seized her by the shoulder and shook her. "Go up to your own room, and hold your tongue."

She was a little bit of a thing, with a little white face, and everything fine and delicate about her, yet even as her father shook her, or rather laid hold of her shoulder, intending to do so, her eyes gleamed fire into his face, and she cried, with the same determination as before—

"I will make you repent it—I will!" Then she turned and left the room, but before closing the door, she looked back. "It is a lie, I tell you—it is a lie every word you've said to me against Randal Tollemache!"

Then she flew upstairs, and locked herself into her own room. She did not ap-

pear for dinner, but at ten, when her *chaperon* called to take her to a ball, Una appeared, dressed all in gossamer white as usual.

"Papa," she said, going straight up to her father, who had been detailing the whole scene over and over again to her mother, enriched with fresh comments from himself each time, "Papa, is it quite impossible that this matter about the cheque should be hushed up now? I know you would wish it to be so if it could be."

Sir James was startled, and mollified all at once.

"Quite impossible," said he, sadly. "Come, my dear child, make up your mind to it, but don't go to this ball to-night. You can't put a good face on the matter now. The kindest thing anyone could do would be to tell Mr. Tollemache

to send in his papers at once, and you'll find you will forget him soon."

He laid his hand caressingly on her arm, but she shivered away from his touch. Sir James looked annoyed, and half swore. He never swore quite out loud in his wife's presence.

"Una," said Lady Stapleton, "we should all be much more comfortable if you stayed at home to-night. And give your father a kiss; he would like it, I am sure."

Nothing could be less authoritative than Lady Stapleton's gentle tone, so perhaps it was not wonderful Una disregarded it.

"You are sure," she asked, "that in no possible way it can be hushed up now? Not even if you went and begged Colonel——"

"You are silly, child. It is not one officer. It is all the officers. Do you think any of them would sit down to

dinner with a man accused of forgery?"

"Falsely accused," said Una.

"Very well, falsely accused, if you like," said her father, turning away, and beginning to walk up and down the room in his irritation. "But I should have to prosecute to prove that now. Is that what you wish?"

"Oh! I wish nothing now," said Una, in a sort of broken voice, and turned away shivering, and went shivering down the luxuriously-carpeted staircase to the luxuriously-cushioned carriage waiting for her.

"The girl is breaking her heart for him," cried Sir James, throwing himself down at the foot of his wife's sofa, and burying his face in his hands. "I can't bear to think of it, Maria. I forgive her everything she said this afternoon. But she'll dance with him this whole evening, mark my words. And I hadn't the heart to tell her not to."

But Una did not dance all night with Randal; she danced two successive waltzes with him faster than ever waltzes were danced before, and then she suddenly disappeared, *chaperon* and all. For a full hour after she had gone away, Randal Tollemache stood in a corner looking on at the dancers, without speaking to anyone. Then he, too, disappeared. And next morning Pall Mall and St. James's knew that he had left for the Continent by an early mail boat, and that he had sent in his papers before doing so. Several of his brother officers had been at the ball the night before, but he had said good night to none of them, as he had stalked out of the room with his usual bandit stalk. It was wonderful how opinions were divided about him. Some men thought his flight alone proved his guilt; others were ready to stake their honour on his innocence—an

officer of the Household Brigade might do many things, but he could not be a burglar or a forger.

Curiously enough both parties agreed in taking up Una Stapleton, when she appeared again in the London world without a trace of colour in her cheeks, and without a jasmine bouquet.

"So Randal gave them to her," men said. "Poor fellow! he could ill afford it." And then they thought again of that cheque for £300, and wondered if he had forged it.

Never was a young lady so much pressed to dance by Guardsmen. Una was no longer a *débutante*, a young *ingénue;* she was one of the sensations of the season.

By the end of the season, if anyone had cared to generalise, which, as a rule, society very rarely does, it might have been observed that Una numbered among her

regular partners all the richest men about town. They had no other special quality in common, unless that they were generally not overburdened with wits. Miss Stapleton seemed to have a slight preference for rich fools over rich wise men, but the one thing a man must have to dance with her more than occasionally was evidently a large fortune.

She was engaged for several yachting excursions at the end of the season, so she did not accompany her father and mother home to the Priory. They were just as glad she did not. Neither Sir James nor Lady Stapleton felt quite comfortable with their daughter now.

So when Una arranged a trip to the Mediterranean, under the protection of one of Randal Tollemache's former married friends, they asked no questions, but let her go. She was away all the Winter,

and then there was the London Season again, and it began to be known that Una Stapleton liked yachting men, also that she was the best-dressed young lady about town, and that, if a man wished to mark himself as distinctly fashionable, he could not do better than try to become her favourite admirer. She always had one at a time, but she discarded her admirers very quickly, unless they were yachting men; then she seemed to expect to be invited for cruises in their yachts with parties of her own selection, and she always accepted the invitations. People said she was not equally ready to accept other offers, and accused her of a hard heart. Una, however, protested to her chosen women friends that no man ever had offered her anything more than a seat in his drag, or a cruise in his yacht. She absolutely boasted of never having received

a single offer of marriage. Not another girl in London made such a boast, so that there was something very distinguished about it; and, besides, no one ever believed her, neither man nor woman.

She came home to the Priory betweenwhiles, and often brought yachting men and women with her as a defence against the hunting set, she said. No one interfered with her but Allan.

One day he objected to her that her friends were too fond of brandy-and-sodas, and that, after a hard day's run, he objected to being kept up all night in the smoking-room. Una looked up with a white, dove-like face.

"Why don't you go to bed, then, dear fellow? They'd none of them notice."

"No, I daresay not," said Allan, indignantly. "There's that fellow Meynell half seas over every night. I hate to

see you speaking to him in the morning, Una."

"It is a little failing of his," said Una, sweetly. "We all put up with it because he's such a dear, good fellow, and his yacht is such a good sea boat. But you might just as well go to bed, Allan. No one thinks it necessary to sit up with him."

"It is not the thing in a fellow's own house," said her brother, grumblingly. "And as to Mrs. Delaney, I can't think how you can ever have gone about with her, Una. You see, you're only a girl, and you don't know the sort of things she says to men."

"No, really! Of course I'm only a girl, and all I know is, she has been *very* kind to me—always *very* kind," said Una, pathetically. "After all, what she says to men can't do them much harm, I should say."

"No, I daresay not," said Allan, worsted as usual.

Not but that Una was very complaisant to Allan; she showed him all sorts of little attentions such as even the most loving sisters do not always show their brothers, little attentions that betokened an amount of thought and care that sometimes startled Allan, and made him reproach himself for not caring much for her. Some of his men friends were, he knew, really fond of their sisters, and none of them had a sister so pretty and so admired as he had. Yet he did not care for her, and he knew it. The young men of the county also did not care for Una; they voted Stapleton an excellent fellow, but their impression was that Miss Stapleton —that, in fact, she only cared for yachting men.

"So absurd!" cried their sisters.

"She's the best-natured girl there is. Una never thinks of herself at a party. If it were not for her, the Priory would be nothing like the place it is, and now everyone likes to go there better than anywhere. Why does she not marry?"

But Una did not marry, though she gained in prestige and fascination every year, that is, for rich men who kept yachts. She was called the *Spirit of the Foam* now, a name that perhaps described her better than even the longest description could. She was like innocence itself, till she smiled up into a man's eyes, and then he suspected breakers ahead, and all kinds of things. She could, of course, smile after a different fashion, but I think very few men trusted her implicitly, after they had once looked into her eyes. Yet fools are so apt to think themselves more than commonly knowing that they are easy to be lulled

back into confidence, and this preference for fools seemed to grow upon her.

Yet she herself was undeniably clever, and her brother knew it so well that, when he went down to the Priory to announce his engagement to Margery, he considered seriously whether he would not appeal to her for aid in the first instance, and follow her advice.

"Una," he said to her, "I am in love."

"Yes, my dear boy, I know, with Lottie Spluck. How nice to be *in love* with a million or two! Heaven knows how many." Una's smile was decidedly sarcastic; then it changed, and she said sweetly, "And she's such a nice girl too, thoroughly suited to make you happy."

"I can't say I think so," said Allan; "but that's neither here nor there, as I am not in love with several millions, but with a girl without a penny."

"Then let it alone. That is all I advise you," said Una, carrying off a little porcelain vase in which she had been arranging two moss rosebuds and a bit of stephanotis. "The governor's particularly hard up just now, and so am I. Not that that matters to anyone but myself!"

"How ever do you manage to pay your bills, Una? You cannot afford to dress as you do upon your allowance."

It was a very evident fact, such an extremely evident fact, that it was a wonder it had never before occurred to any one of her own family to comment upon it. But it never had.

"It is very clever of me, is it not!" said Una, with a little cooing laugh. "You could never be so clever, Allan. So marry Miss Spluck. She is coming here soon, and you know she means to have you."

"I know nothing of the kind," said

Allan, growing very red, and deciding Una was of no use; so he went off unadvised to his mother's dressing-room, where he found her as usual lying down before the great fatigue of dinner. Before he knew what he was doing, Allan was telling her everything. Then Sir James came in, and heard a short *resumé*, and swore a few round oaths even in his wife's dressing-room, and stamped about the room, and told Allan he knew he had debts.

"Yes, I know I have," said Allan, ruefully.

"Then leave this tom-fool business alone, and marry a wife who needn't care about them."

"I shall never marry anyone, if I do not marry Margery," said Allan, biting his lips hard to keep back the tears. "And if I can but have her for my wife, I shall never regret being a poor man except for

her sake. She ought to marry a Prince."

"Then let her, by all means," raged Sir James.

"My dear James," said his wife, "you don't consider my head. Making a noise won't do any good. And if Allan wishes it, he must do it. Talking to people never makes any difference."

"No more it does," said Sir James. "Well, if you like to make a fool of yourself you can, only I don't engage to pay your debts."

"Very well," said Allan, and, stooping to kiss his mother, went away to prepare for dinner, only more convinced than ever that he had the dearest, sweetest mother ever man was blessed with.

When Una heard how affairs were settled, she said quickly,

"If Allan is going to marry her, we ought to know her. Would it not be a

good plan to ask her down here when all those people are coming, Miss Spluck and all. Perhaps, after all, if he saw her among other people, he might cease to think her so wonderful. It would certainly be pleasanter for us all if he married Miss Spluck, and I can't fancy any man being in the same house a fortnight with Lottie without falling in love with her."

"That's right, Una, that's a good idea of yours. Let's ask the girl down, mamma. The boy says she is a beauty; we'll see what his taste is. He ought not to be my son if he does not know what a beautiful woman is, ought he, mamma dear?"

Then Una went out into the moon-light in the garden, and passing her arm through her brother's, said lightly, "I've just been persuading them to ask—Margery to stay here."

"No, have you really, Una?" cried her

brother, pressing her hand almost painfully in his gratitude. "You really are the best girl I know." And then there came the twinge of remorse as usual. Why did he not care for her as other men, he knew, cared for their sisters?

"Oh, I don't approve at all, you know," said Una. "I think it all very foolish. What has being in love to do with marrying?"

"Una!" cried her brother, at once checked in the rhapsody he was going to pour forth in Margery's honour.

"I used to think so, of course, just as you do," said the soft voice beside him. "Long ago, when I read Mrs. Hemans and Byron, and thought lovers ought to risk everything for each other. That was when I knew Randal Tollemache; there was something of the melodrama about him. But it does not do in real life. By

the way, Allan, I heard of your meeting him the other day, and his introducing you into a very bad set, not at all consistent with marrying a penniless beauty."

"How did you hear of it, Una?" asked Allan, growing rather red in the moonlight. He knew perfectly well he had been foolish; but from whom could his sister have heard of it?

"Never mind how I heard of it. I hear lots of things," said Una, still in the same gentle, half sad tones. "That sort of set does no harm to women. They can't make us play high—at least, I make a point of never paying when I lose, and everyone knows that, so it can't harm me; but I should think it very bad society for a man. Do you know the damp is making me quite hoarse? I think I must go in. You liked Mr. Tollemache, I suppose, that you cared to see so much of his friends?"

She had turned to go into the house, but paused, yet without looking back, as she asked this question.

"I never knew a man make such desperate friends with me before. I suppose it was for your sake, Una. There was something between you long ago, was there not?" Allan had been at Oxford at the time, and heard very little about it.

"Ye-es—ye-es, there was something. We danced together, you know, and I believed in love then, and thought men cared as—as women care—in novels of course I mean. If I were to begin life again, I should act very differently, Allan. It would not be amiss, perhaps, if you were to take warning by me, but I suppose men never do, especially by their sisters,. You think yourself in love with this Miss Travers now. Well, you won't be a year hence. Why not fancy it a year hence now?

Depend upon it, it's all a mistake being in love and marrying, the two things should never be mixed. The last requires plenty of money, and an easy-going companion. The first does not at all."

Una passed away into the house, and left Allan puzzled. Had she broken her heart almost before he remembered, or had she never had one to break? Anyhow, he came to the conclusion that Randal Tollemache was probably about the greatest villain he had ever come across, and he wondered why he had cared to have anything to do with him, or his friends. Una was right about that warning, but he thought it an odd thing for a girl to have any opinion about. Then his mind reverted to Margery. That was a much pleasanter subject for contemplation, and he soon forgot all about Una. Yet in the years long afterwards he remembered it all.

The little slight figure that paused without looking back, the soft voice that asked, "You liked Mr. Tollemache?"

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING POT POURRI AT THE PRIORY.

A SMALL, but lofty room, in the decoration of which all rich colours mingled together, yet toned so as to harmonise with one another, and the world in general. Stamped leather hangings, of those deep soft reds and blues that blend with the eye-satisfying tints of the Italian school; Florentine frames upon the walls, and dark-browed beauties by Bronzino looking gravely out of them; also some of Correggio's Cupids from the Abbess's Chamber at Parma, copies all of them, but copies by very skilful hands; a soft, rich Turkey

carpet, showing a rim of dark stained wood beyond; book-cases with old books in once splendid bindings, old china on gilded brackets filling up the intervening spaces, and on the centre table two large china bowls, clustered round which were a group who looked as if they might have stepped out of one of Watteau's pictures. The *Spirit of the Foam*, and beside her, with velvet coat and knickerbockers, and rich red tie, almost obscuring his wicked old face and shiny eyes, Lord Talboys, who had just built the biggest yacht yet known in the Cowes squadron, and stepped into Una's good graces by so doing. He was handing her roses, which she pulled to pieces.

They were initiating Miss Spluck into the old-fashioned mysteries of *pot pourri*. Miss Spluck had arrived a little earlier in the afternoon, and was still in her travelling

dress, brown silk of various shades, supposed to resemble the leaves in Autumn; it was looped up round her slight, graceful figure, and it fell from her shoulders *à la* Watteau, and trailed on the floor behind her, and did everything that silk possibly can do, when it is of the very softest, and the number of yards unlimited.

Mingling with the folds of the silk were Lottie's own soft curls, which some people called golden; but which, unless the sun fell upon them, were really only of the prettiest possible shade of bright brown, and which fell down her back like a shower, yet at the same time casting a softening shade over the bright young face, that was just now drooped like a lily, and a little pensive in its expression. For the American girl was feeling strange among the old hereditary grandeurs of the first English country house at which she had stayed;

she had a consciousness of coming from a new country, and being herself not quite in keeping with her surroundings. Besides, she felt lonely, without even old Van, as she generally called her devoted *chaperon* to infuse courage into her, or young Stapleton to give her welcome.

Lottie Spluck was believed not to find her curt surname any prettier than other people did, and to have every intention of changing it on the first good opportunity. Hitherto young Stapleton had been supposed to be her favourite admirer. And now Lottie had accepted his mother's invitation to stay at the Priory, and where was Allan? Lottie barely knew the others, and felt strange and forsaken—a perfectly new sensation for her—while she stood drooping her pretty girlish head, and watching Lord Talboys and Miss Stapleton pulling roses to pieces. Lottie had six-

button gloves, so she only watched at first.

Una was dressed *à la* Watteau, too, but perhaps she had long projected making *pot pourri*, or possibly her dress had put it into her head, for it was all covered with little knots of carnations, just such as the elder Leslie loved to paint, and coming out of it, her little fair face looked even more innocent and dovelike than usual.

Some people said Una Stapleton never looked so well as in a tarpaulin hat and white serge dress, with a squall blowing down channel; but then those people had not seen her in bouquets of carnations, making *pot pourri* in the Italian room at the Priory.

Lord Talboys barely looked at Miss Spluck, who was yet so prètty a girl that she might easily have been talked of as the American beauty, had she not been too well known as the great American heiress.

His rather watery brown eyes were riveted on the fair whiteness of Una's cheek and throat, or the little significant movements of her hands and eyes.

Una could not have acted any part but one to save her life, but she acted that part inimitably—pretty, pleading, innocent. Some people knew that it was all acting, but they only liked to watch it all the better because of the art in it. There was a locket tied by a broad bit of black velvet round her soft fair throat; that locket sparkled with diamonds, and sometimes Lord Talboys' eyes wandered from the face to the diamonds. That was when Una's hand went up, and took hold of the locket caressingly, and settled it into that one little dimpling hollow of her throat that seemed to be its proper place. She would glance up at Lord Talboys as she did so, very innocently and prettily. Her

eyes seemed to say, "The velvet was teasing me a little—I am making it quite comfortable now."

That was all the little pantomime said to Lottie, on whom it was not altogether lost, but it said a great deal more to Lord Talboys, who had seen that locket before, but for the first time this day on Una Stapleton's throat.

Una always wore handsome ornaments, yet it never had occurred to either Sir James or Lady Stapleton to ask how this was so, seeing her allowance was none of the largest. Allan had once commented upon a new bracelet on his sister's arm, but then Una, twining both hands upon his shoulder, and looking confidingly up into his face, had whispered softly,

"And how about last Derby, Allan? You were rather heavily dipped, I heard. It is fortunate I don't come to you for

bracelets, and I *don't* go to the Jews."

"Very fortunate indeed," Allan answered, drily, mentally resolving he would never ask his sister again about her money affairs.

Una had not thought it necessary so far to say anything about Margery to the little party round the *pot pourri*. She hoped, as her father and mother hoped also, that the marriage might yet be averted. And Una was the last person to announce the engagement unnecessarily. All she said, as the clock struck six, was:

"There is a very handsome Miss Travers coming down by the same train with Allan. I suppose they will arrive together directly."

"What Travers does she belong to?" asked Lord Talboys. "Was her father—"

"Has beauty any need of a father?" interrupted Una, looking up with the smile

that no yachting man could resist. "You and I, Miss Spluck, must make the most of our little day, for, if what report says of her is true, none of these fickle men will look at us again while she stays here. To-morrow I mean to come down to breakfast in a little calico gown, with my hair combed behind my ears like a charity-school child."

"The smallest compliments thankfully received, eh?" said Ned Walmsley, a young man in a Government office, who floated himself in society by the minuteness of his details as to the last scandal, and a superfluity of the lightest possible jokes. He had for some years sung in the choir of an advanced High Church of those days, and though his voice had cracked in the process, he retained the tone of thought induced by it. The serious did not exist for him, except to make jokes about. But

he had till now been quite seriously trying to worm some intelligence out of Lady Mary Redmayne; a lady who had arrived at the age when women seek rather to shine by their talents than attract by their beauty, and with the propriety of whose conduct no one had ever been able to find fault, though she had been separated from her husband almost ever since her marriage. Society had vainly attempted to guess why. Mr. Redmayne was a most agreeable man in his set, Lady Mary a most agreeable woman in hers. The only difficulty was that the sets a little intermingled, and people sometimes wished to ask them to meet at those charming little dinners of eight, at which they both were such acquisitions, and at which everyone who knew both felt they would suit each other so admirably. But no! Lady Mary and Mr. Redmayne, having once agreed to

pass through life together, had since been driven to the resolution "never, never to meet again." So the little dinners had to suffer.

Lady Mary passed for a clever woman; she often chaperoned Una Stapleton, and professed great confidence in her, but sometimes she had doubts about her.

When she saw Ned Walmsley, and understood he was to stay some time at the Priory, she said, sadly,

"Then I have been mistaken, and there is something underhand——"

"About Miss Stapleton?" cried Ned Walmsley. "Not that I've heard of?" with the tone of So no one else can have! "But what I want to know, Lady Mary—"

"That is all very well in the House," laughed Lady Mary; "but 'want to know' does not do in society. I wonder at you, Mr. Walmsley."

"You are always so good-natured," pleaded he. But all in vain, and then he turned away with one of his jokes. If they had not come from him, people would not always have known what they were meant for; but he had a light comedy voice and manner, and did not mind making himself ridiculous.

"Stalks are not wanted, Miss Spluck," said Mr. Yorke, solemnly. He was a good deal troubled by the idea of the American girl's wealth, being himself notoriously hard up, and, as many people said, on the point of selling out, or, at least, of exchanging from the Guards into some regiment on foreign service. There was nothing he enjoyed more than a flirtation with a pretty girl in a general way; but the vision of her immense wealth awed him, and forced him to take refuge in silence or stiff politeness. "Excuse me,

but you are throwing away the flowers."

Lottie looked up as from a dream, and a little more American than usual in consequence.

"I guess your brother will find it real provoking to arrive here, if he is coming with this great beauty," she said to Una.

"Here they are!" cried Una, and the door of the Italian drawing-room opened, and Margery appeared through it, followed closely by Allan; Margery absolutely cold with shyness, and consequently with her head more thrown back than usual, and her face prouder and sterner.

The magnificent way in which she carried herself struck a sort of consternation into the little circle. At the first glance Una looked like a washed out doll beside her, while Lottie dwindled into a slip of a school-girl. Margery was indeed "a daughter of the gods divinely tall,"

besides, everyone felt at once that she was born to Florentine frames, and rich subdued Italian colouring. She seemed to bring a memory of myrtles and orange flowers with her, and at once suggested purple skies and molten sunshine. The other girls, with their finery and ornaments, belonged to a meretricious French school, and had no business there. Margery wore only a simple trailing skirt of black with massive folds, she had thrown round her shoulders a woollen shawl of deep lustreless crimson all gathered into folds over the left shoulder, as ancient statues wear their drapery. There was a crimson glow reflected on her face, her long lashes trailed upon her cheek, and her large grey eyes dilated as she swept them round the little circle carelessly, as if she thought too little of those she saw even to disdain them, till her eyes rested upon Una,

coming forward and holding out her hand in her prettiest fashion.

Margery was already deeply interested in Allan's sister, whom she had seen once before, and pronounced a being of another sphere. Now, when she saw her coming forward with such a pretty gesture of welcome, her whole heart went out towards her at once, her eyes softened, her chest heaved, and finally she bent and kissed the softly upturned face that was pouting out its pretty lips. Una knew Allan would be pleased by this welcome of his *fiancée*, and it was always part of her policy to please her brother, except when he criticised herself. But she said afterwards,

"Her beauty quite took my breath away, and I felt the only thing was to kiss her, and make sure that she was real."

"Mother is so sorry that she cannot be

here to welcome you," said Una, sweetly. "She is lying down with one of her headaches, in hopes of being able to appear at dinner; and papa has not come home yet, I am afraid. Anyhow, I must carry you off to your room at once now, for you will only just have time to dress, and rest after your journey, as it is. You must be dreadfully tired, I am sure, such a hot day as it has been."

"So, Mr. Stapleton, I have had to do the honours of the beech-tree avenue and the cypress alley all for myself," Miss Spluck was saying, holding out her slender fingers, and at once taking possession of Allan, as if he were her property, and must be her dog to fetch and carry, now that he was come at last.

"I've seen that face before, I'll be hanged if I haven't!" Lord Talboys muttered, half to himself, as Una carried off

Margery, taking a great deal away with her as she did so.

The room seemed to resume its natural proportions, and looked rather gloomy as she left it. But Margery had paused at the door before passing out, and looked back at Allan, and he had returned the glance without heeding Miss Spluck's attempt at appropriation. Who would have heeded anything while obtaining such a shy, fond, lingering glance from such grey eyes!

He now looked at Lord Talboys with a cool, supercilious gaze, which did not, however, impress that nobleman as it should have done.

"Not a face to be easily forgotten," said Lady Mary Redmayne.

"Who is her father, Stapleton?—Where does she come from?" asked Lord Talboys.

"The lady to whom I have the honour

to be engaged is daughter of the late Captain Travers, whom you may easily have met in your continental rambles, if, as I have often heard, they were chiefly spent in gambling places."

"What! Dick Travers!" cried Lord Talboys, slapping his leg. "Dick Travers! By Jove! So this girl is his daughter, and you're engaged to her—to the old flame of the Hereditary Prince—"

"To no man's old flame," said Allan Stapleton, haughtily, "but to Miss Travers, the daughter of Dick Travers, as you call him, and whom you seem to have numbered among your acquaintance."

"I should think I had!—I should think I had!" chuckled Lord Talboys, no whit disconcerted. "And I only wish I hadn't numbered so many of his I O U's among my acquaintance, too. She was a devilish good-looking girl then, though,"

and Lord Talboys whistled and chuckled to himself. "A very good fellow was Dick, too, in his way. Mother a dancer, I think." This he said in a whisper behind his hand to Ned Walmsley, but everyone heard it except Allan, who, after his own last speech, had walked forward, and thrown open the Venetians noisily, so as to let in slanting rays of sunshine. The room had looked dark since Margery had left it.

Miss Spluck had been listening with head thrown back, almost in Margery's style. Allan Stapleton, the nicest young fellow she knew, engaged to that girl!—the daughter of a dancer, and who looked it! Lottie laughed to herself. The engagement must be broken off. Evidently Allan Stapleton did not know what was good for him. She, Lottie Spluck, had come to the Priory determined to accept him, and she meant to do so yet.

Lottie was a spoilt child, and quite as much accustomed as any Stapleton to having what she wanted.

"How sweet one's hands smell, playing with these flowers!" said she, smiling shyly as she held them up, and smelt at the pink tips of her long slender fingers. "I think making *pot pourri* the most delightful thing in the world. Like everything old-fashioned and English, quite delightful. But do you see, Mr. Stapleton, I have got a thorn in one of my fingers? I am very unhappy about that."

"Where?" asked Allan, sympathetically, and proceeded to extract the thorn. Somehow he found kneeling on one knee the most convenient position for doing so. Lottie bent her pretty, girlish face, with its long soft curls, over him, as he thus knelt in her service. They made a very pretty picture together.

"'And marry the daughter of a dancer after that!" chuckled Lord Talboys, nudging Ned Walmsley. "The girl has got a million dollars, if she has got a cent. Oh! never tell me!"

"Report says you are about to marry Miss Stapleton yourself. I suppose that is the reason you are so much interested in the pecuniary prospects of her brother," said Harry Yorke, who could afford to be insolent at times, in spite of his debts. "An unprejudiced on-looker would say that Miss Spluck was more likely to be thrown over for Miss Travers, than Miss Travers for Miss Spluck."

"I never knew before that you were so youthful, Mr. Yorke," said Lady Mary, turning with a smile from the man who had been engrossing her attention for the last few minutes, and evidently regarding youthfulness as a merit.

Harry Yorke was, however, young enough to look offended.

Just before dinner Allan caught Una for a minute.

"What did you mean, Una——"

"By asking Lord Talboys here? I knew you'd ask that. But what could I do? All *my* friends are yachting, and it would be almost an insult to ask Miss Spluck to meet such notoriously penniless young men as Ned Walmsley and Harry Yorke, so I thought a rich Earl a splendid idea. Yankees dearly love titles."

"I never thought Lord Talboys was much a friend of hers," said Allan, with a slight shade clouding his face for a moment. He had thought Lottie very nice, very nice indeed—*till* he had fallen in love with Margery. The idea of her having anything to do with Lord Talboys was revolting to him.

But Una gave him no time to reflect upon the subject now.

"As to Margery—I must call her by her name now—I'm quite in love with her already, and I don't wonder you are, Allan. Of course it is an intensely stupid thing marrying for love, and all that," she added, shrugging her shoulders a little. "But for a woman like her a man might easily think the world well lost."

There was such a dreary sadness in these last words that, for the first time since she had been his baby sister in short frocks, he in rather longer blouses, Allan drew her towards him, and kissed her.

"My dear Una, why should not you——"

But Una had started, and now slid out of his arms, almost as if she were a serpent.

"Allan, how can you!" she said, and, to his horror, she was cowering among the

sofa cushions, sobbing a sort of drawn-out sob, such as one hears from a child that is very unhappy, and very, very weary.

Allan looked at her, confused, puzzled, longing to comfort her, yet not daring to attempt it. At last Una spoke, in a little laughing voice, but with her face still hidden among the cushions.

"You never heard me cry before, did you? I always think there's something very desperate about the sound of it myself. You see, it does not come naturally to me. Some faces always look dislocated, when they smile. It is crying that is difficult to me. Make haste now, Allan, and dress; you must be downstairs to introduce Margery. So awkward papa's not coming home before!"

"I cannot bear to see you so unhappy, Una. Is there anything——"

"How absurd! What should there be?"

When Allan looked back upon it long afterwards, it disturbed him much to remember that Una looked up with just the little pink colour and innocent pout that other men found so bewitching, and which he had seen her wear a hundred times before. But at the moment he was reassured, and thought that her explanation was correct, and that her heart-broken sobs meant no more than the few tears he had known other women shed about almost nothing.

CHAPTER VII.

AT ALLAN'S HOME, AMONG ALLAN'S PEOPLE.

POOR Margery! how anxiously she had thought about the toilettes in which she was to make her *début* at the Priory! Allan had begged her to dress herself prettily, and he had offered her money with which to do so.

Margery had turned away with the first words of anger she had spoken to him.

"It is for my sake, Margery, for my sake," he pleaded. "To please me, not yourself. To make my father and mother more willingly consent to our marriage. You cannot call it borrowing of me now.

Every man has a right to make a present to the girl he is engaged to, and you have never accepted anything of me yet."

"I have accepted your love, Allan," she said, in a deep voice, that seemed to come direct from her heart. "Do not take it ill of me, please, that I do not care for anything else after that. But if you wish it, let us go out and choose pretty things together. I like wearing pretty things, Allan. Only let them be cheap, please. You would not have the girl you love *look* as if she were dressed at your expense, would you? Let me wear cheap, simple things, such as people might fancy I had paid for myself."

Allan could not but acknowledge this would be best. But now, when Margery proceeded to put on the black net dress that she had provided for the occasion, she almost wished she had been more ex-

travagant in her purchases. The net she had chosen looked coarse and common among her delicate surroundings; the very drapery of the toilet-table seemed finer—that also was edged with lace.

Margery, of course, had not seen how Una and Lottie had faded into insignificance on her first appearance, but not one of their expensive ornaments had been lost upon her, and she herself had not one single ornament. Besides, it was the first time she had ever worn a really low dress. Allan had told her it was the custom in England, and that at the Priory she must wear one every night. Margery almost began to cry as the long mirror reflected unflinchingly the somewhat Spartan simplicity of her toilette. She looked to herself so very undressed. How she wished she had not so positively declined Una's offer of her maid; then she might at least

know if she were like other people or not. But just then Una's maid appeared with a handful of fresh fragrant roses.

"Would not Mademoiselle like some of these? Mademoiselle Una had sent them."

If Una had been taken with Margery, Margery had altogether lost her heart to Una.

"Oh, why did not Allan tell me more about you?" she had asked before Una had left her. "I see you are just as noble and kind as he is."

"Is Allan noble?" Una had asked, laughingly. "I certainly am not, but I am kind sometimes, *when* it suits me."

Then had come the offer of the maid, and after that Una had gone away. But now these flowers came from her, and Margery welcomed them with delight.

"Oh, do I look like other people?" she asked imploringly of the maid.

"*Mais non!*" said Elise, with her mouth full of hairpins, as she proceeded to fasten the roses into Margery's hanging plaits of hair. "I have seen all the *grandes dames* in London and Paris, but Mademoiselle *a quelque chose de plus.*"

"I meant," said Margery, rather sternly, "is my dress like what people wear?"

Elise took it up between her finger and thumb, and examined it rather contemptuously.

"*Pas de la première qualité*, and Mademoiselle has sleeves too. *C'est dommage avec de si beaux bras!* No bracelets, and no necklace! *Eh bien, la beauté n'en a pas besoin.* But I should like to make a *vraie toilette* for Mademoiselle one of these nights. There is nothing that she could not wear," she said, stepping back a little, and looking at Margery. "A tiara of diamonds, and lace flounces of inestimable value! They

would hardly be noticed on her. That, they say, shows *la vraie noblesse.* Any peasant can look well in a cotton gown. *Tenez! cela vous va divinement,* Mademoiselle," and she fastened a last flowery spray on Margery's shoulder. "Sir James will be delighted. Mademoiselle Una thinks so too, I can see that."

Margery flushed all over; she could not help seeing herself that her face had never looked handsomer, and she hoped Sir James would be pleased, and Allan satisfied. Yet she felt nervous, as she thought of facing them all, no faithful Allan following close behind her to give her comfort. She turned once more to Elise, and asked the question that was tormenting her, boldly, outspokenly,

"Then my dress is not too low?"

Elise was contemplating her in a curious manner, her head on one side, her eyes

half shut. She started now as if from a dream.

"Too low!" she said. "That is how I should like it to be," drawing an imaginary line about half way down to Margery's waist. "It is only the no necklace and no bracelets save you from the air of a prude, as it is. But *tiens, c'est drôle*, I was thinking just now I could never dress you as I could wish, I do not know anyone who could. I know how to put on the rouge and the pearl-powder, where it is wanted, how to make a stick or a pillow look like a woman, how to shorten the waist, how to put on curls or plaits where the hair is wanting. I know how to supply deficiencies as well as any Parisian, but—you have no deficiencies, absolutely none," shrieked the Frenchwoman. "There is no scope for my art, and to the end of time you must look as unfashionable as that Venus all

artists rave about. At this moment, if you were on a pedestal, who would know you were not a statue? No, no, the gentlemen downstairs may all lose their hearts to you, and think you divine, but you would make the despair of the most accomplished lady'smaid that ever lived. For my part, I do not like real beauty; give me *la petite Americaine*, with her diamonds. There's a doll to dress up, and such a toilette as she has got on this evening. But, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* there's the gong!"

With a smile, half of amusement at Elise's rhapsody, half of pleasure at hearing familiar French spoken once again, Margery moved swiftly along the corridors. The butler himself, who had just announced dinner, threw the door wide open for her, and she passed into the drawing-room, where the whole party were already assembled together waiting for her. Some

women, who have been about Courts all their lives, never to the end attain the art of walking into a room. To Margery it had come by nature, only her colour was a little heightened, and the lashes were trailing somewhat shyly upon her cheeks as she entered the long drawing-room; then she raised her head and looked up, the large grey eyes dilating slightly as they searched for Allan.

Lottie Spluck was standing in the centre of the room, a tangle of pink and blue silk, with lace that looked as if it might fly away peeping out here, and there, and everywhere. In her hair was a knot of wild roses from Paris, and a spray of diamonds not from the Palais Royal. Una's hair was bound back with pearls, pearls were shining round her throat. She had stuck one white rosebud in her bosom, her dress was all soft, and white, and shim-

mering, and she looked even more than usual like the Spirit of the Foam.

Then came in Margery, with her grand young loveliness shrouded rather than shrined in coarse black net, but with a wealth of roses in her hair and bosom. Other ornament had she none. How well she would have looked in diamonds! They seemed to miss them as they looked at her. Sir James stared, and then started.

"By gad! why did you not tell me what she was like?" he exclaimed to his son.

But Allan's "It would be rather difficult, would it not, sir?" was lost upon his father, as he hurried forward to receive his future daughter-in-law with all the courtesy and cordiality he could command.

Lady Stapleton even rose from her couch, and went forward a few steps to receive Margery; but she disappointed Allan a little by not kissing her at once. He won-

dered why his mother did not, when his sister had; he did not consider that his mother loved him, and took so for granted he knew it, that she was not on the look-out for fresh occasions to persuade him of it. Una, on the other hand, was.

However, Sir James treated Margery quite as his daughter-in-law, also as the greatest stranger there, and insisted on himself taking her down to dinner. Thus Allan found himself conducting Lottie, and could only gaze from a distance at Margery receiving Sir James's rough-and-ready compliments in her queenly style, with every now and then a softening of the eyes and mouth, as she glanced down the table at his son.

After dinner, however, he found himself beside her.

"I am so sorry I did not get a better dress, Allan," she whispered. "I should

have believed you about it. I know I must look very strange."

"Strangely beautiful, certainly," said Allan; but then he was in love.

Anyone else must have noticed that Margery was very plainly dressed. It was only Una and Lottie, however, who, as they glanced at each other, were conscious that they had each put on their grandest dresses to shame her, as it were. Neither had known the meaning of her choice till she saw the other.

After a while the piano was opened, and Una, with the wisdom of the serpent, could only be prevailed upon to play a morsel of Chopin; but Lottie, with youthful imprudence, sat down and sang an old English ballad, very fairly. She had a sweet, girlish voice, and was rather pleased at any opportunity of displaying it. An English ballad was her last acquisition.

Then Margery was asked if she would play or sing, and having observed Miss Spluck go to the piano without requiring any pressing, did likewise, and sang an air from an Italian opera with all the pathos and passion of which she was capable. Everyone was startled; even Lady Stapleton sat up upon the couch on which she generally lounged, while Lottie was quite carried away in the general burst of admiration, till she bit her lip for vexation to think that she herself had attempted to sing before her.

"The mother was a singer—I remember perfectly now," whispered Lord Talboys into Una's little exquisitely shaped ear.

She only raised her eyebrows a little. "Foolish of Allan to let her! But he does not know one note of music from another, and does not consider what remarks it may excite. *Foolish, foolish* fellow! I

know Lottie Spluck would have had him, and this girl would make her fortune on the stage. It really is magnificent."

"Brava! brava!" applauded Lord Talboys, clapping noisily, while Margery, having finished her song, rose from the piano, her eyes lifted inquiringly to Allan's face, as if there only she cared to read approval.

"You outdo yourself, my darling," he said, smiling on her. The man would have had a heart of iron who had not smiled in answer to that look, and Allan was troubled by no thoughts as to Margery's birth, parentage, or education. He was simply head over ears in love with her herself. He moved, breathed, lived in the recollection of her smiles. He went to sleep murmuring "Margery," he woke in the morning with her name upon his lips, he dreamt of her all night. Everything that she did was perfect in his eyes. If

she had squalled, or shrieked, he would have been delighted; as it was, he was delighted that she sang perfectly.

But Margery was as yet quite unaware of his want of appreciation; she was satisfied that he was pleased, and was about to sing again, when Lord Talboys coming up, and asking to be introduced, said,

"We have met before, Miss Travers."

"Indeed," said she, turning coldly away, without even looking at him enough to see whether she recognised him.

"Your father was a friend of mine, and though, as I said, we have *met* before, I am delighted now to have the opportunity of making his daughter's acquaintance." And Lord Talboys actually held out his hand.

Margery looked at it coldly, disdainfully, then, with voice and expression equally icy, she said,

"Pardon me. I am not accustomed to shake hands on a first introduction, and the last person with whom I should wish to do so would be any friend of my father's. If you wish to make acquaintance with me, you must first forget, as I forget, any meeting in the past." The people who heard her were petrified, and those to whom these words were repeated could not believe that she had uttered them.

But Margery was singing as if perfectly unmoved in low, happy tones, and Allan was transported. Even his unmusical ear discovered the perfect harmony and happiness of her song. Yet when he drew her aside for a few moments, the first time he had succeeded in doing so, he said,

"My dearest, how did you meet with Lord Talboys before?"

"I have not the slightest recollection of ever meeting him before."

"Then what made you speak to him in that way. It was hardly—hardly——"

"Hardly ladylike, do you mean, Allan?"

She looked up at him so sorrowfully, as she spoke, that he hastened to answer at once.

"No, dearest, I did not mean that, of course. But it was certainly not very courteous, considering he is a guest here."

"He is a bold, bad man. I could hear it in his voice," replied Margery. "But I am very sorry I said what was not right to him. You know, Allan, I am so accustomed to take care of myself, and to—to—to——" she faltered, and looked down.

"My own dearest," said he, "you are quite right, and I am quite wrong. The fault is in having the man here at all. I wish we had not. But do not let us think of him any more now. It seems like a

dream, a delightful dream, to have *you* here."

"Perhaps it is a dream," said Margery, gravely. "That does not make it less delightful. Let us dream with all our hearts, while we can!" Then, with a sudden transition of tone, "And this has always been your home, this grand, beautiful place, and you have always associated with people like these, and you have stooped from your grandeur to lift me up to you. How can I thank you enough, dear Allan? It is like heaven! I can never thank you enough."

That was the first evening at the Priory, before all the beautiful surroundings had become things of every-day life to Margery, whilst she still believed that respectable people never borrowed money, and that ladies and gentlemen abhorred, as she abhorred, the so-called pleasant vices of

the Bohemian set, among whom she had lived before.

Let us take a last look at her, her head drooped, her eyes suffused with tears, as she turns away from Allan with the candle he has just handed to her, and then pauses and looks back with eyes full of love, and gratitude, and maidenly modesty, and sees him standing motionless, gazing after her. Una and Lord Talboys are doing something or other, what is not very clear, with a fascinating little lamp, which she carries in lieu of a candle, and Lord Talboys is looking at Margery with a wonderful deal of admiration expressed in his coarse, wicked old face, whilst Una is looking up at him from under her eyelids, watchfully, very watchfully. But Margery is all unconscious, she is looking back at Allan, all love, all gratitude, all modesty. Suddenly Allan sees a flower that she has dropped.

He steps forward, presses it to his lips, and smiles. Margery smiles too.

"Good night, dear Allan," she whispers softly, and follows Miss Spluck and Lady Mary along the passage with a heart brimming over with happiness.

As Lady Mary turns to say good night, she is so struck with the sweet, happy face, that involuntarily she bends forward to kiss her. Margery is so happy, it seems the most natural thing in the world that everyone should love her, and she is about to kiss Miss Spluck also. But Miss Spluck does not seem to notice her intention, and says good night with only a bow, and a heightened colour. Then Una comes up, and passes her arm round Margery, to lead her away to her room.

"I am coming to scold you," she said. "How could you make such a scene with that dear old Talboys? He was a great

goose, of course, flourishing his previous *meeting* with you, as if it were something tremendous. But you need not have annihilated him quite at once, need you?"

"I am so sorry. Allan told me it was wrong," said Margery, humbly.

"My dear, I didn't mean to bring you down from Love's Paradise unto this world of cares," said Una, laughingly. "There, now, don't cry about it—only behave a little prettily to him to-morrow, that's all. He is my friend, though not Allan's, and I don't like anyone else to snub him but myself. Now good night. I suppose you'll sit and look at the moon, and think of Allan for the next hour or two, but it would be much more practical, in that case, to let Elise unpack your things."

"I will be practical myself," said Margery, smiling. "Good night, dear, dear

Una. Thank you so much for being so kind to me."

"So kind to you!—oh, so kind to you!" said Una, smiling a little mischievously. "I advise you to wait a little while before you are so sure of that, my dear Margery. But you think me worthy to be Allan's sister, do you? Well, that's satisfactory."

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD TALBOYS.

"OF course I know that a woman's proper sphere is matrimony, my dear Sir James," said Lady Mary Redmayne. Some women always say "matrimony," not "marriage;" possibly there is not much difference of meaning between the two words, but the preference for one over the other is generally very significant. It must be remembered, however, at the same time, that Lady Mary was speaking some ten years ago, and would not be at all likely to take anything of the kind for granted in this advanced epoch at which

we have arrived, when both men and women alike think marriage very reasonable when either meets with some one endowed with every good quality which they themselves have never troubled themselves to acquire, or, alas! sometimes suppressed; but when women, no more than men, seem inclined to call it their proper sphere. Lady Mary was speaking, however, some ten years ago, and as it was, she continued her speech—"But, for all that, a few solid acquirements would, I think, do women good. But you are the best authority just now," she added, turning to Allan. "What is the best training to make a woman a good wife, that being established to be the be-all of her existence?"

Two or three people thought Sir James had got upon rather ticklish ground with Lady Mary, but Allan did not even think of this, as he passed the question on to

Margery. They had all moved out into the garden after breakfast, and for the most part assembled under the more picturesque than refreshing shade of an old cedar of Lebanon, with two trailing branches resting upon the grass. Allan was lying at Margery's feet, and he only looked up into her face now, as he passed the question on to her, half whispering,

"What is it?"

"So it is for you to answer, after all, Miss Travers. Well, what is it?" asked Lady Mary, looking at Margery with that mixture of half-envious admiration, half sorrowful tenderness, with which women not beautiful, and past their youth, may often be seen to regard those who are yet young and lovely.

"I thought it came by nature," answered Margery, timidly, a deep flush suffusing her cheek.

"Bravo! bravo! my future daughter-in-law!" applauded the ever-noisy Sir James. "I augur better for my boy's future happiness from that speech, than if you had studied all the ologies and philosophies into the bargain."

Even as he spoke Margery ceased to blush. She met Lady Mary's eyes looking at her closely, scrutinisingly, as if reading her inmost soul, and so from her inmost soul she spoke quite frankly to Lady Mary alone this time, not heeding the others.

"I do not know what a wife's duties are. I should have thought it was a wife's duty to support her husband's courage when his spirits drooped, and to make his daily life a daily joy, and encourage him to nobler efforts; but most men seem to be making no efforts, and it would only trouble them to hear of anything higher than amuse-

ments. Often I have thought that the wives of such men must sink lower than women should, almost deny by their lives that they have souls, unless they themselves take the lead, and assign to their husbands the part one would rather see assigned to the wife, that of adding a little pleasantness to a life of toil. It is very strange, when I look at the world I always see it so different from what it is described in books. There it is always assumed men are the nobler, and working at noble aims. That is not the case."

She said the last words decidedly, and then stopped.

"Some men have noble aims," said Lady Mary, suavely.

"Then the duties of those men's wives are very simple, to help their husbands in every way, only never forgetting that they themselves must also have noble aims, or

else by their very inferiority always at hand they must be tending to lower their husbands. But what duties have the wives of those men who get through their mornings with cigars, brandy-and-sodas, and billiards, and the afternoons in the same way, and the evenings—worse? What duties have those men's wives?"

Harry Yorke was silent, Lord Talboys amused, Ned Walmsley so busy making mental notes of these extraordinary remarks that he had no leisure to pay the slightest attention to them himself. Sir James was decidedly puzzled, and got up to shout after a gardener. As to Lottie, she was simply boiling over with indignation; did that girl think she was describing Allan Stapleton? Could she possibly think that? Una thought it best to bide her time, and see what happened next; thus only Lady Mary cared to reply.

"My dear Miss Travers, you seem to have known very extraordinary men. Most men are busy from morning to night —from morning to night. You see men when they are on leave, or enjoying their holidays, and the mere fact that they so completely unbend then, are so entirely idle, ought of itself to suggest to you how great the—the strain has been till this respite arrived." Then, in a lower voice, "Believe me there are differences in men."

"I do think of something else besides amusement, Margery," said Allan, very low, for her alone. His conscience seemed to have pricked him, for though he had been lying on his chest on the ground, his chin propped on his hands, staring fixedly at the grass, that would hardly alone account for his face being so red now, as he looked up.

"Yes," said Margery, absently. She had

not in truth been thinking of him at all, but of other men she had known. "Yes?" she now added, interrogatively; but Allan vouchsafed no further information as to what he thought of.

"I see that you think deeply," said Lady Mary, speaking very kindly, and markedly addressing Margery to the exclusion of the others. "It is a very dangerous thing to look any subject, whatever it is, straight in the face. It immediately entails upon you the duty of looking at others in the same way. What do women think of besides amusement? What is the distinction between work and amusement? And what is worth working at?"

Margery's face grew alarmingly grave.

"I am very ignorant," she said, meekly. "I know nothing either to help myself or others."

Allan took her hand smilingly.

"My dear Margery, I am sure you are the most deeply-read young lady of my acquaintance. I thought my father had got a strangely ill-chosen ally," he added, good-humouredly, to Lady Mary. "She has her table covered with books on philosophy, and I believe intended putting me through a course of them, till she found me too hopelessly ignorant."

"I must beg you don't attempt anything of the kind here," interrupted Una now, in her most childish tone. "The Priory is the most easy-going place in the world, not even croquet is permitted here, because of the rules. If philosophy were introduced, I don't know but that it might blight the roses. Only Lady Mary is ever allowed to talk seriously here, and I've never heard you before go further than the Poor Laws. What do you want with edu-

cating women now? Surely we break our hearts quite enough as it is."

"I wish I thought you had a heart!" murmured Lord Talboys.

"We might break them less, if we knew more," sighed Lady Mary.

"I don't believe in broken hearts," said Miss Spluck, decidedly.

"No, I daresay *you* don't," broke involuntarily from Harry Yorke.

"What a variety of opinions!" laughed Allan. "I wonder which side has it. I agree with you, Miss Spluck. Don't you, Margery?" How his voice softened as he spoke to her!

"What is a broken heart?" asked Margery.

"Hear! hear!" came in chorus from the men; then Lord Talboys' voice was heard in the ascendant.

"Miss Spluck does not believe in hearts, and Miss Travers asks what they are. Isn't that about the state of the case? And yet, to look at them, one would think no two young ladies could have had better opportunities of judging."

"Why? Do I look as if I were wearing the sere and yellow leaf?" asked Lottie. She spoke as if in joke. But she looked down pensively, and began pulling a daisy to pieces.

"Are none of you men going to do anything this morning?" asked Una. "Everyone knows our hunting is better than our shooting; but, Allan, have you mentioned that the preserves are particularly well stocked this year?"

"No, I don't know that I have. Do any of you fellows want to shoot?"

"No!" said Lord Talboys, decidedly.

"No!" said Harry Yorke, first glancing

at Miss Spluck, and then, recollecting her fortune, preparing to get up and shoulder a gun, if the other men had the bad taste to wish it.

"The men would like to see what the ladies do," said Ned Walmsley, in a little meek voice. "You write letters generally, don't you?" he asked of Una. "It must be very pretty to see you all writing together, just like a class at school. Do you copy each other's letters sometimes?"

"No, we don't copy," said Una, with a little movement signifying so much more than her words. "We have each our own style. Lady Mary writes on social subjects; I—I write to my dressmaker; Miss Spluck would write poetry, if she wrote at all to-day, and you," she said, looking over at Margery—"you write philosophy, I suppose? Come, and tell me what it is. The love of life is what it teaches, is it not? I

know a philosopher is always expected to take everything with equanimity. But you don't look like it at all."

"Not like loving life?" said Margery, rising and sitting down near Una, between her and Lord Talboys, who made room for her. "I love life intensely."

"So do I," said Lord Talboys, leaning forward, and looking into her face. "Death is a horrid idea, isn't it? No sun, no beautiful women, no *wine!*" There was something persistent in the accent he laid on the last word.

Margery looked round at him with surprise, but Una had bidden her behave prettily to him, so without at once turning away, she said, gravely,

"When I love life, I do not think of death."

"Nor do I generally," said Lord Talboys. "But you are the very incarnation

of life, and you forget we met once before. Never mind, your secret is quite safe in my keeping." He was speaking low, so that the others could not hear.

"I have no secrets from Mr. Stapleton," said Margery, coolly, "and I do not remember ever having seen you before."

"I know you never looked at me—most women would have. Even admiring you, as every man must admire you, Miss Travers, I think it would have been more to your credit if you had. Yet I can hardly even now believe it possible you did not know my name, nor anything. I certainly did not dream of it last night, when I alluded to our meeting; and, to tell the truth, I thought you lied then, when you said you had forgotten it, so I spoke to you now to tell you you need not fear my speaking again of what evidently, and perhaps naturally, was a painful remini-

scence to you. Every man has his own ideas of what befits a gentleman. I have not other men's, but I have my own. You need not be afraid of being in my power at all, because I had the chance to render you a service you have long ago forgotten. Only, if you remembered it, you would know why seeing you makes me at once think of death and wine."

He rose as he spoke. More than one of the little group was already wondering what he had been speaking to her so long and so seriously about, especially remembering her vehement denial of any previous acquaintance with him the night before.

"Going to write your love-letters, Lord Talboys?" said Una, looking up at him with a meaning smile, as he glanced round at her moving towards the house.

"How is that possible with you here,

Miss Stapleton?" and he moved away humming a tune.

"Stop, stop, Lord Talboys!" exclaimed Margery, and as he did not seem to hear her, she sprang from her seat and followed him. "Lord Talboys!" she repeated.

He only thought good to hear her just as he was passing out of sight through a window that opened on to the garden; there he paused for her, and Margery could be seen speaking to him even more earnestly than he had before spoken to her. Lord Talboys seemed to laugh and wave his hand, then he laid it rather unceremoniously on her shoulder, and signified to her that she must come into the house. She did not shake off his hand, and they both disappeared through the open window.

"Just the sort of girl I fancied!" thought Lottie Spluck, and at once saw no sin in

trying to win young Stapleton's affections away from such a girl as that. But only an American girl could have flirted as she at once set to work to flirt all through the Summer morning with Harry Yorke and Allan Stapleton at once.

Meanwhile, Margery had followed Lord Talboys with a face white and sorrowful, and when she had at last succeeded in arresting his attention, had exclaimed—

"Was it you, Lord Talboys, who saved my life, and more than my life, and whom I never thanked for it?"

"Pooh! my dear Miss Travers, there was no question of saving your life. You are making too much of the whole thing now. Von—what was the fellow's name? —never meant to have more than a kiss."

"I should have killed him before he had got it—I know I should have killed him!"

cried Margery, her whole frame quivering with excitement.

"I know you meant to do so, and very likely you might have succeeded," said Lord Talboys, coolly. "Therefore, I was all the more glad to be able to knock him down before anything serious occurred."

"But that led to your risking your life next day, and I have never thanked you all these years. Oh, you cannot know how I have repented it, and repented it! And then to meet you last night, and be rude to you, after all!"

"Well, you certainly did not seem very glad to see me," laughed Lord Talboys. "But come in, do; there's that Ned Walmsley looking our way, a devil of a fellow for gossip, and it does not do to be too much talked about."

"No, that was the reason," continued Margery, entering obediently through the

window, "that was the reason I could not thank you. I knew I should get so talked about—so talked about, and it always was so dreadful to me, I could not bear it," and she covered her face with her hands, and shook all over, "and my father—my father told me you had risked your life, and the wounds were dangerous, and yet —yet I could not be grateful, I could *not*."

"There wasn't the least necessity. If Dick Travers told you my wounds were serious, he told you a lie, my dear. There, that's all I ever got in your service," and turning up his sleeve Lord Talboys showed a little crooked scar. "Nevertheless it gave me the opportunity of wearing my arm in a sling for some time, which I was proud to do for the sake of Madge Travers. Come, sit down, child, you've worked yourself into a fever about nothing. If I hadn't thought you must know all about

it, and remember me perfectly, I'd have bitten my tongue out, before I'd said a word about it. 'Pon my soul I would; and you may trust me when I say that, for I'm not given to making myself out better than I am. And yet most men would give a great deal to persuade such a beautiful woman as you are that she was under a debt of obligation to them."

"Then you say my father told me a lie!" asked Margery, looking up gravely, with tears trembing on her lashes.

"Oh, I didn't say that, did I? Bless my soul, there are so many ways of telling a story. Very likely he believed it, when he told you. As you say, duels get talked about. Besides, you can't blame him if he had your interests at heart, and thought a little scheming allowable, so that he might secure them. I daresay he thought he might do worse for his daugh-

ter than get an English earl for her husband, and pity sometimes works wonders. But if you recollect, Madge, I never was introduced to you—never asked to be."

"Why did you not?" asked the girl. All the pride and spirit seemed gone out of her. She looked worn, and sorrowful, and beautiful exceedingly.

"Because I wasn't going to be made a thorn in your side, and I knew you didn't care for rank and riches for yourself, and that there was a thing or two more likely than that you'd fall in love with my ugly phiz. Bless your soul, child, I am old enough to be your grandfather, and so I always was. And just because I'd had the luck to knock down a heavy German fellow for you, who would probably have knocked me down if he'd been sober, I wasn't going to be a plague and a torment to you."

"Lord Talboys, you have been very kind to me. I am grateful to you now, and I thank you very much." She took his right hand, and pressed it in both hers as she spoke.

"Come now, Madge Travers, you ought to know more of life than to treat me like that. You've been associating with that good young Stapleton too much lately; you forget other men have blood in their veins, and I might be tempted to ask a kiss for myself."

Margery dropped his hand, and stood before him, her head thrown back, her cheeks on fire.

"There! now I like you a deal better like that. I like to see a woman on the defensive—not too much trusted to my good behaviour. I feel as if I were on honour then. And I ain't to be trusted quite so far—don't deserve so much confidence."

"I think you deserve a great deal of confidence, Lord Talboys, and I thank you from my heart for saving me from being a murderess."

"Sh! sh! don't say that," said Lord Talboys. "Never let me hear you say that again. Don't go to the bottom of things in that way. You were angry, and the dagger came handy. It is a dangerous thing to wear a dagger, that's what it is. Not but that I daresay you were right. Dick wasn't the best protector a girl could have, and yet he wasn't a bad fellow—not half a bad fellow, after all. Considering the life he had led, there was a wonderful deal of good left in him still."

"You think so?" asked Margery, pausing, and looking back, her eyes brimming over with tears. "Oh! Lord Talboys, you knew my father, do you think—do you think it is possible——"

Her voice was choked with tears. Lord Talboys drew nearer in expectation.

"Do you think it possible he is in heaven?" sobbed the girl.

"Why, my dear girl, you've come to quite the wrong box to ask that question. If it was about the other place, I might know something!"

"Then you think—he is *there?*" asked Margery. Her whole attitude, her white face, her distended eyes, all showed horror, almost despair. And Lord Talboys stood before her, whiter, and more confused, than he had ever been in his life. There was actually a singing in his ears. He had much the same ideas about heaven and hell that he had had when he was a baby-boy, and wore pinafores; he had never even thought enough about them since to know whether he believed in them or not.

"I hope we are not intruding," said

Una's dove-like voice, as she entered through the open window, followed by Ned Walmsley. "Everyone is coming in to luncheon, so I am afraid you must be disturbed. Have you two been talking all this time? You look as if you were rehearsing a tragic scene."

"Miss Travers was talking to me about her dead father. It has upset her a good deal," said Lord Talboys, as Margery fairly turned and fled.

"Talking about the late Captain Travers!" said Una, with a glance at her companion. "From all I have heard of him, it must have been most edifying."

"You needn't believe me unless you like, Miss Stapleton. But upon my soul, there's something strange about that girl. Of all the people in the world, why should she ask me where—where——"

His teeth chattered a little.

"Where what?" asked Una, coolly.

"Where her father was now."

"Why, he's dead."

"Yes, I know, my dear Miss Stapleton. That's the reason she asks me where—where he is now," and he broke out into a sort of horse laugh, as if to obliterate the recollection of his previous agitation.

"A most perplexing question, I must acknowledge, Lord Talboys. What a shame to ask you, of all people in the world!"

"Why me, of all people in the world? Why not ask me as well as another?"

"Oh! I don't know. I thought you said something to that effect. I assure you I meant nothing, only to repeat your words," and she looked up at him with her most innocent expression. "You see, you have a guilty conscience, knowing you have deprived Allan of so much of his *fiancée's*

society, and left him exposed to the full battery of Miss Spluck's charms! She has been making herself quite irresistible to him and Harry Yorke. How do people manage it? I wish I could! I wish anyone would think me irresistible!"

"You're a great deal too irresistible, you know," whispered Lord Talboys.

"Oh, you hoary-headed deceiver! Haven't you been looking at your own reflection in the most beautiful grey eyes in the world all the morning?"

"They're too large," grumbled Lord Talboys. "I don't like Tragedy, Una; I like Comedy—*very* light Comedy—or a farce."

"Don't expect me to act a farce with you, and don't call me Una—you know you haven't the slightest right."

"I thought you gave me leave."

"That was before you talked to Madge.

You can't talk to Madge Travers *and* Una, so choose, Monsieur. *Le jeu est fait, faites votre jeu.*"

"How do you know I call her Madge, you little witch?"

"I hadn't the slightest idea of it, you old goose! What a strange mixture she must be to allow it!" and she looked up with an inquisitive expression at Margery, who had just re-appeared in the luncheon-room.

"Margery, will you ride this afternoon?" Allan was asking. "Miss Spluck wants us to make up a riding-party, and explore the country. What is it, dearest? You look pale."

"I have a headache, and I have been bathing my forehead a little. I should like to ride very much, dear Allan, but I never have done so, except quite as a child."

"Oh, never mind—I'll take care of you," said Allan. "It will do your head good, I daresay. You're not afraid, are you?"

"Afraid? Oh, no!"

It was not in the Travers' nature to be afraid. Margery smiled sadly, recognising herself as a Travers even as she spoke. She thought courage was the one virtue her father's family had bequeathed to her, for the rest she attributed to it all possible vices, and wondered if they were her birthright too.

"I get my voice, at least, from my mother," she thought. "Do I not get anything else from her too? How curious I have never thought of it before! Allan is Sir James' and Lady Stapleton's son. He is not a bit like them." Then she pondered a little more. "They are neither of them at all clever—neither is he."

She might have got further, but was interrupted by Ned Walmsley's saying,

"Miss Travers, I have been ordered to help you to chicken. May I, or may I not, have the pleasure of sending you this Merry thought? This is the third and last time of asking."

CHAPTER IX.

FIRST AN IDYLL, AND THEN DIAMONDS.

"I THOUGHT, dearest, you did not remember meeting Lord Talboys before?"

"I did not."

"And now you do?"

They were riding, and up to this time Allan had been occupied in caressing Margery's horse, and giving her directions as to its management, but now his mind had reverted to her long disappearance that morning.

"Dear Allan," said Margery, turning her head and looking full into his eyes,

"I am very sorry for what I said of Lord Talboys last night. I know still he is, as I said then, not a good man, by which I mean"—and she paused to consider a little what she did mean—"that he does not even wish to do right. But he has shown me, what I am always forgetting, that—that there is hardly ever pure evil, or pure good. Years ago he saved—virtually he saved my life, Allan, I don't want to tell you how it was. I can never think of it all without shuddering. Even now, you see, I cannot. He knocked down a man who was impertinent to me, and next day there was a duel. He assures me now he was very slightly wounded, but I heard then it was dangerously. And you may think how bitter and how wicked I was, I never even felt grateful towards him. I never asked if he got over it, I never listened to his name. Of course he could not

believe I had been so bad, so he took for granted I recollected all about it, when he spoke to me last night. And then—and then, Allan, he behaved very well to me in those dreadful old days; he never even would be introduced to me, lest—my poor father——"

Margery's difficulty in speaking was increasing, and she came to a stop here.

"Do not tell me any more about it, dearest. There is no necessity to speak of those old times, that pain you so. I am glad Lord Talboys came to your assistance, though I wish——" The veins were standing out on Allan's forehead, and his face was more flushed and agitated than it had probably ever been before. But he tried to speak lightly. "Look, dearest, you have almost dropped your reins, and I wanted to point out to you where my father's land ends. Let us try a canter on

to that next hedge. You have no fear, I see, and I shall be able to show you better."

At that moment Lottie dropped her whip, and Harry Yorke sprang from his horse to pick it up, but Allan was beforehand with him, and cantered up to return it to her. Margery's horse wished at once to canter too, somewhat to the discomfort of its rider, so Harry Yorke tried to quiet it for her, and then mounted and rode alongside of her for a few minutes.

It had been hot when they started, but now a gentle breeze had sprung up, whilst the sun still dappled the trunks of the trees with very beautiful lights and shades. The cows, ruminating in the meadows, only added tranquillity to the scene, and once or twice rosy-cheeked children ran out to open gates for the little party, laughing all over as they did so. It was one of the days that make one think even life itself

worth the living. One of Margery's long plaits of hair fell down, and Lottie fastened it up for her, Harry Yorke meanwhile gathering some wild strawberries, and presenting them to the fair hairdresser as her reward. She and Margery shared them, while Allan gathered little knots of wild flowers for both of them. Then some cows were driven home to be milked at a picturesque old farm, and the little party all dismounted to taste the fresh warm milk. For love of the ladies, even Harry Yorke drank half a tumbler, though he had said something about beer in the first instance. A calf came and rested its innocent young head on Margery's lap, and Lottie persuaded a most beautiful four-year-old boy to kiss her, in spite of all his shyness.

"This is like an Idyll!" she exclaimed. "How I should like to be a farmer's wife in dear Old England. Look, there are bee-

hives! listen to the humming. And a whole row of hollyhocks, all quite upright!"

"What do you say to sweet-peas?" asked Harry Yorke, coming back with a fragrant handful. They were making themselves quite at home at the farm.

"Think of the bad seasons, Miss Spluck," said Allan, "and the potato crops all failing. You see, I am seriously considering turning farmer, so I must look at the dark side as well as the bright."

"No, not really! Mr. Yorke, it is not Leap year by any chance, is it? I am beginning to be afraid, lest I have made an offer, talking of farmers' wives. English people always do think us Americans very forward, don't they?"

"I don't know," said Harry, still on one knee adjusting the sweet-peas in Miss Spluck's habit. He had already presented Margery with some, without any such

excess of gallantry. "But if all you care about is the farm, and you won't be particular about who's the farmer, Old England will have to look to its armies, for we shall all be turning our swords into ploughshares."

"Do you find the idea of a farm so enchanting, Margery?" asked Allan.

"Just now it is," said she, smiling, "so much so that I think it almost cruel in you to make me realise that petting a calf even might become tiresome after a time."

"Here are two gentlemen professing themselves ready to become farmers for the sake of being petted, I believe," cried Lottie. "Which of them were you comparing to a calf, Miss Travers?"

"Allan is more like a lamb," replied Margery, calmly indifferent to the other's sauciness, rising and passing her arm

through his, "and as for me, *you* think I am like a lion?"

"*I* think so!" said Lottie, surprised now herself.

"Recollect, Miss Travers, it is only in the Golden Age the lion and the lamb can hope to go about together," remarked Harry Yorke.

"And is this not the Golden Age?" cried Margery. "For all of us, I mean? Does not the world look brighter and fairer, do not the flowers smell sweeter, are not our hopes more confident, our visions of the future far happier than they could possibly be in anything but the golden age of youth? We are all young *and* happy."

"Young and happy!" they echoed her words. They were so true, and it seemed none of them had realised it before. Young and happy! young and happy! How rarely those two words go together!

Then that restless Lottie flicked Margery's calf with her riding whip, and said,

"Do you know I thought you meant to be personal when you came to the Golden Age?"

"Because of your curls!" said Margery, eagerly. "With the sun upon them, they are certainly the loveliest gold."

"My curls!" laughed Lottie, drawing her long soft tresses forward, and looking at them a little. "It ain't much anyone thinks of the gold in my curls, I guess. It is the gold in my hand gets me such pretty compliments, and I would turn my sword into a ploughshare, if you would be a farmer's wife. Do you know how much it is, Mr. Yorke, and whether it is at my own disposal? Oh, how I heard people talking at the first London ball I went to, when they didn't know me by sight."

"Well, how much is it, Miss Spluck,

and how much at your own disposal?" asked Harry, folding his arms, and looking sternly at her. He had turned away half in anger at first, but seemed determined to pay her back in her own coin now.

"It is all at the disposal of this little hand," said Lottie, looking down at a particularly pretty, ungloved little hand. "Sometimes I wish the hand were bigger, or in some way more worth than the contents."

Both the young men's lips were sealed, it was left for Margery to say,

"That is wishing a great deal, if you are so very rich."

"A great deal," flashed back Lottie. "Do you care so much for money, then?"

"I like to have enough to eat and drink," said Margery, humbly. "Perhaps you do not know what it is to be poor. I have only known that, and I have thought

it must be so *delightful* to be rich. One of my ancestors, they say, meant to sell his soul for money; many people, I am sure, sell their hearts. They think being rich alone will make them happy."

"To be able to buy anything one wants, and not think twice about the price," said Lottie, mockingly. "Yes, that would make anyone happy, of course."

"That alone could make no one happy," said Margery, quickly.

"Oh, you think one might want love too," laughed Lottie, still a little bitterly.

"But you are loved by so many—everyone must love you, I should think."

"And you too."

"Only by Allan," and Margery turned and looked at him as if that *only* did not mean much.

"And is that not enough?" asked Lottie, indignantly. "Pray, are you two gentle-

men grown into mutes at a funeral all on a sudden? By the way, I expect we'd better be riding home, if we mean to have any baked meats, or roast."

"Can I assist you to mount, Miss Travers?" asked Harry Yorke, most markedly leaving Miss Spluck in the lurch.

But they had not gone far before the little quarrel was made up, and he and Lottie were even a merrier couple, cantering along in the sweet evening air, with the slanting sunshine gilding Lottie's curls again and again, than Margery and Allan, with their lovers' confidences. Yet Margery was saying to Allan,

"I shall never forget this afternoon. It seems to me the first time I have ever known the peace of contentment. Look at it, Allan—the gentle slopes, and the carefully-tended, well-grown trees, and the soft green grass that the sheep crop

regularly, and the sun, almost like a painted sun, so quiet and still. Is it not all like happy English country life? No earthquakes, no volcanoes, no great tragedies—all quiet, peaceful, and so happy!"

"I hope all your life now will be like this, Margery," said Allan, coming a little nearer than his horse quite liked, and thus necessitating their riding a little further asunder than before.

"I know it will not be your fault, dear Allan, if it is not," said Margery, pensively. She felt as if she had been almost too happy, and needed a little serious thought to recollect herself.

But the time for serious thought seemed never to come, and before Margery could have thought it possible, all feeling of novelty had worn off, and she was quite accustomed to velvety carpets, and lace-trimmed toilet-covers, to obsequious ser-

vants, and elaborate dinners; accustomed also to long days spent in the pursuits of pleasure in the midst of all such beautiful accessories as seemed to suggest the idea that life was nothing but one prolonged act of enjoyment, or a flitting like the butterfly from flower to flower.

She had become accustomed to being the observed of all observers, and to surpassing all her companions in whatever might be the pursuit of the hour. Was it singing or music? She was unrivalled. Was it *tableaux vivants?* After Margery had once posed, no tableau was considered worth the looking at in which she did not take a part. Was it billiards? There the old Travers' stroke came out, the skill that may almost, indeed, be said to have been their ruin. Margery showed herself a true Travers at the billiard-table. She had often played before, and there was

not a man of the party who could handle a cue so dexterously as she could. She was not a skilled horsewoman, certainly, but this hardly suggested itself to the onlookers, who only saw that her seat was perfect, and that she showed no fear. Had she felt any, it would have been alien to her character to show it; but, as it was, she felt none, and the highbred animal on which Allan delighted to mount her, curveted and arched its neck with pleasure, as if at once recognizing the mastery of her light, firm hand. Allan had been so enchanted, when he had first seen this, as even to have forgiven Lord Talboys his outspoken admiration. But Margery was accustomed to it all now, it was all like a twice-told tale to her. She stood by the window one evening, and asked herself,

"Why does Allan love me so?"

For a moment or two she tried to think

it was because of her beauty, but she put this idea away from her with some of that self-contempt for having entertained it which she was subject to feeling for herself. If she had smallpox, or any yet more disfiguring disease, would not Allan press her blurred and altered visage only the more lovingly to his heart, sorrowing for her, not for himself, that her beauty had gone from her?

"He is worth them all!" said Margery, staring out into the quiet evening, all gentle shadow now. "He is worth fifty of me, and yet—and yet——"

She leant her arms on the window-sill, and looked out in the accustomed Italian attitude one may see so often in those southern lands where people stand at the window and look out hour after hour. She was thinking how it would have been had the man who loved her understood music,

and loved it, not for her sake, but its own; had he had intellectual tastes, and been capable of originating ideas which she could not understand, instead of, as now, not understanding those with which her head was often full to aching.

Margery had had absolutely no regular education, but she had read much at various times, especially during those few months in London, when she had tried to live respectably, and like other people. Max Müller was a favourite author with her, Herbert Spencer's Philosophy she had also meddled with, though she could hardly be said to have understood it. Allan had laughed one day when she had shown him a passage in one of the latter's books.

"I can't make either head or tail of it," he had said, lightly, "and I don't believe there is either head or tail to it."

How would it have been had the man

who loved her not only had patience for such studies, but had also had learning enough to guide her through their difficulties? As it was, Allan would hardly have believed, had she told him, that she often sat and puzzled by herself over the subjects which she believed these books would have made clear to her, could she only have understood them. When she talked to him, she felt herself always under a constraint to talk of mere surface matters, unless she liked to listen to his loving protestations, or was satisfied to be unintelligible to him, as she knew she very often was.

"I wonder why he cares for me?" thought Margery. "He knows nothing of the best part of me, nor anything of the worst part either, thank God!" she added, hastily. "How I wish I could be one thing or the other, either wholly

good or wholly bad! Now one part of me would not mind marrying Lord Talboys for the sake of those diamonds he is always telling me would so become me, and queening it over society as a beauty and his wife. I never thought I should care for anything of the kind, but now I think I should like it. I should not sing then; there should be nothing then to remind people of my mother. I would be a Travers altogether, and I would ruin Lord Talboys before he even knew I had begun to be extravagant. The other part of me——"

Margery sighed as if it were dangerous even to think of what that other part of her wished, and yet that was what she considered her higher nature. She closed the window, and began to dress for dinner. There, lying on her toilet-table, was a little parcel directed to her. She took it

up, and opening it, saw a box containing a pair of earrings, pearls and diamonds. Lord Talboys had lost a Philippine to her a few days before; he had asked what he should give her, and, at the same time, himself suggested earrings. She supposed these came from him, and she fastened them in her ears, and looked at herself. She knew enough of precious stones to know the pearls were very perfect, but she hardly looked at them; the diamonds from which they hung seemed to fascinate her eyes, and a thirst for diamonds took possession of her such as she had never felt before. She had borne to see them on other women, but now to see them in her own ears, and only there! She wished, as Elise had wished for her, to have a tiara of them, a necklet all of diamonds—diamonds on her fingers, and a golden snake, with a ruby head, twining round one arm.

For a moment she saw herself with all these ornaments, felt a shimmering white satin clinging round her, and imagined the softness of old lace about her neck and arms. There was no longing for the admiration of others mixing in this intensity of wishing to wear all that women deem beautiful and precious. But it only lasted for a moment; then bitterness wrung her heart, as she thought that it could never, never be now. For that she ought to have married the Hereditary Prince years before. She fastened the little decoration he had given her on black velvet, and tied it round her throat as a charm to remind her of the old days, when she had thought grandeur and riches but poor things in comparison with some she had now gained.

And yet, was this world, in which she now moved, so far superior to the old

world? People did not seem to gamble and drink quite as much, but if they did not do things, they talked of them, and to Margery's mind that was worse, having less temptation to excuse it. She could understand—yes, she *could* understand marrying Lord Talboys, and even running away from him afterwards; there *might* be temptation in both cases, and she *might* yield. But that any woman could take a pleasure in discussing another woman's doing such a thing, was unintelligible and wholly shocking to her. Yet even gentle Lady Stapleton had grown animated in the conversation the night before, whilst Una had dropped occasional meaning phrases into it. As to Lottie Spluck, she had tossed her curls, and asked Harry Yorke to take a stroll in the moonlight with her. They had disappeared for a long time, and after the others had finished

discussing the past scandal, they had begun to comment on the present impropriety and American manners, till Lottie had appeared again, and throwing herself into an arm-chair, her little feet, in their Louis Quinze shoes, well displayed, had exclaimed,

"I guess I'm dead beat. There's Mr. Yorke been walking me up and down, and up and down, as if I were a horse that required exercising."

"Even at the Priory such prolonged moonlight excursions are remarkable," said Una, demurely. "We were beginning to wonder what you two were talking about. I hope it was very interesting."

"We were talking of the time when we were children, weren't we, Harry? And it seems we were both as lively as—as pop-corn, and a perfect torment to our nurses, who doted on us notwithstanding. Were you a happy child, Mr. Stapleton? I can't

believe you were ever very naughty."

"No, I think I was rather a good boy," said Allan, laughing. "It was Una who was always in mischief."

"So you are still," whispered Lord Talboys, but rather as if it were a compliment.

"And you, Miss Travers?" asked Lady Mary. "Whilst everyone is voluntarily confessing, what have you to say of your childhood's happy days?"

"I do not remember them," Margery had replied. "But I recollect being pleased once."

"Pleased once!" cried Harry Yorke and Lottie in chorus.

"When was it?" asked Lady Mary, who always looked at Margery very kindly and gently, but rather with the same interest with which a surgeon may be supposed to contemplate the body he is about to dissect.

I refer the reader to Rembrandt's famous picture at the Hague. "I should like to know the one occasion on which you were pleased."

"A friend of my father's took me into a jeweller's shop, and asked me to choose what I should like," said Margery, speaking pensively, and regardless of her audience. "I don't know how old I was, but I wouldn't have some ornament he wanted to tie round my throat, because I could not see it there. I said I wanted diamonds to play with. He gave me two, and I hope now they were paste; but I was very much pleased with them at the time, and ran about, and showed them to everyone I could find before I went to bed. It was late when he gave them to me."

"What did you do with them afterwards?" asked Una.

"I never played with them," said Mar-

gery, so gravely that no one dared question her further, save Lady Mary, whom no pain on the part of her victim could deter from trying to obtain an interesting psychological experience.

"Next morning I heard he had been murdered," said Margery, in answer, very slowly, and as if the words were drawn from her against her will. "All his gold was gone, and they were going to bury him. So I went to his funeral. They wouldn't let me in the inn, and the cook said he'd make sugar-cakes for me, if I'd only be a good child, and stop at home. But I wouldn't. I made believe to be happy with the cakes, and then, as soon as the door was open, I ran away with no hat, and my pinafore all dirty. I knew the way to the burial-ground, and I ran as fast as I could, and directly I got to the grave I threw the diamonds in."

There was a little catch in her voice here. Whilst she had been speaking, her face had assumed the expression of the warm-hearted, self-willed child of long ago, and, as they looked at her, they could almost fancy how she had run up to the grave, hot and panting, and thrown her diamonds in, hatless, and in a dirty pinafore, as she had described herself.

"I had had no time to gather flowers, and the diamonds had made me so happy the night before, I thought they might make him happy even in that hole in which they were putting him. But they turned me out of the burial-ground, for throwing stones on the poor murdered man's coffin, and I sat at the gate and cried till the cook came from the inn to look for me. He said I should have some cakes all the same, but I wouldn't eat them, because it was all his fault, my pinafore was so dirty, and

they wouldn't have turned me out if I had been clean, or if I had had breath to tell them what stones they were. They made a little sound on the coffin. I seem to hear it now."

"Poor Margery! it really was too bad," said Allan, bending over her with smiling, yet tearful eyes.

"You only recollect that time as so specially pleasant because the sorrow came so soon afterwards," said Lady Mary, fanning herself softly. "But what made you wish to have diamonds to play with?"

"I don't know. It is a common wish, isn't it?" and Margery looked up hard and cold, no trace of the child left upon her.

"It is common to wish to wear them, but you did not care for that, apparently."

"No, I was a baby, and wished to see the things myself. It was not enough for

me then that other people should see I had them."

"Would that be enough now?" The smile was so gentle, the expression of interest so kind and so subdued, who could have thought, to see her, that she knew she was probing to the quick, and not one person only, but two?

"I do not care for diamonds now," said Margery, loftily, and moved away. As she did so, she caught sight of Miss Spluck's face. It was a little turned away from the general society; she looked weary, and certainly there were tears stealing down her cheeks. But Lottie flicked a lace handkerchief over her face, and the tears disappeared.

Gradually the party began to disperse for the night.

"I think I see her a baby child without a hat and a dirty pinafore, throwing her

diamonds into the grave," said Lady Mary softly to Harry Yorke. "How beautiful she looked to-night!"

"Very beautiful," replied he, with fervour. "I don't know how it has only just come into my head now, but if she were to tell that story on the stage, with only the least heightening of expression, I am sure *half* the ladies would be in tears."

"Look at one who is now," said Lady Mary, laying her hand caressingly on Lottie Spluck's fair curls. "My dear child, there is nothing really to sob about."

"I can't help it," said Lottie. "Think of *then* and *now;* and she looked at me as she finished, and I know she was thinking of it herself. 'You here were all lapped in luxury when I was an uncared-for, dirty child, turned out of a burial-ground because I would give the best I had to the man who had been kind to me.' Oh! she's

led a wretched life, I know, and I am so sorry for her, and I wish, somehow, I liked her better. But she's just the same as ever; she wants diamonds still to *play with*, and she'd throw them away on the impulse of the moment, and nobody could stop her. Good night, Lady Mary—good night, Mr. Yorke," and she was hurrying out of the room.

Harry Yorke followed her. Lady Mary contented herself with looking after her.

"I don't pretend to be a prophet," said a rather cracked young voice beside her, "but if anyone wants the correct tip, I should say there's a chance of Stapleton marrying an heiress yet."

It was Ned Walmsley, and it was Lady Mary's turn to be in a hurry to go to bed now. She dabbled in psychology, and openly avowed that she studied character, but a gossip and scandal-monger like

young Walmsley she altogether despised; yet she felt she had been playing into his hands that night. He had learnt a good deal, thanks to her, and he was going up to town next morning. He was a distant connection of the Stapletons, and Sir James, in his ready hospitality, had told him to run down for a few days again whenever he could. Young Walmsley intended to avail himself of the invitation, but for the present his Office required him in London.

Margery, of course, knew nothing of the end of the conversation the night before, but she recalled how she had said, "I do not care for diamonds now," whilst to-night she stuck the first diamonds into her ears, and thirsted rather than longed for more. She had borne poverty and hardship bravely, but she had always longed for luxury and pomp; and luxury

and pomp seemed holding out their hands to her, beckoning her to come and enjoy them. Could she turn away?

CHAPTER X.

POOR LITTLE HEIRESS!

ALLAN had also gone early to dress for dinner that evening, but he indulged in no reveries, and no one had sent him a pair of ear-rings, so he made his appearance early in the drawing-room, and there found Una inspecting the flowers before the guests came down. It was a rare thing for the brother and sister to find themselves alone together, and after a few words about the flowers, Una seemed to think she might as well make the most of the opportunity, and turning, and looking him in the face, began abruptly,

"Allan, it is no affair of mine to interfere with you, and of course that girl is magnificent, and all that, but have you counted the cost, and all you give up? Do you really intend to go through with it, and marry her?"

"Certainly," said Allan. Anyone who had seen how he raised his head, how his eyebrows neared each other, yet without the slightest suspicion of crossness, and how straight he looked at his sister, would have seen that there was more in that young man than even his best friends suspected, than even the girl who loved him yet divined. It was indeed something beyond her, something nobler than she was herself capable of.

"You do!" said Una, with an air of being relieved. "Well, then, why let her receive so many attentions from Lord Talboys? I half thought you meant to shirk

it, and go in for the heiress yourself, after all. And, of course, I wish you would. Only I don't choose to have Lord Talboys interfered with for nothing. He suits me exactly, and so should I suit him, if it were not for this girl, with her eyes and her voice. Why don't you tell her to discourage his attentions, if you mean to marry her after all? It can do you no good, and it may do me harm."

"I never saw Lord Talboys pay Margery attentions, more than any other man here," said Allan, speaking quite distinctly, quite to the point, not cross at all, but absolutely firm.

"My dear brother, if Harry Yorke, or Ned Walmsley, or one of the others, without a sixpence to bless themselves with, pays her attentions, of course everyone knows it means nothing. But with a real marriageable Earl, with £20,000 a year, it is alto-

gether different. And as to not having noticed his attentions, why, you must be blind! He lays himself at her feet, and would marry her to-morrow, if she would have him."

"If you think so, Una, I hope it has opened your eyes to——"

"To his utter worthlessness. Pray do not go on, Allan," said Una, almost waspishly. "To me he is worth exactly £20,000 a year, neither more nor less. And, as you must know perfectly well, I can't go on as I am. If you were marrying Miss Spluck, my debts might stand over a little, and as long as she is here I don't think there will be any pressure. But when she goes, I must be engaged to Lord Talboys, or——" And Una waved her hands in a manner that expressed unutterable things.

"My dear Una, I hope it is not as bad as that," said her brother, gravely. "I

always feared you were going the pace a little too much. You girls do it really just like men now. But it would be too shocking to me to think for a moment that money difficulties should hurry you into a match with a man like Lord Talboys, where there can be no love and no happiness."

"Love and happiness!" murmured Una. "Love and happiness! My dear Allan, you are demented. But for all that, if Margery loved you, how could she lay herself out to get presents from Lord Talboys, as I am sure she does?"

"Una, how dare you?" exclaimed her brother. "I am ashamed that you should even suggest such an idea. Why, she will hardly take a present from me, and everything she has I know by heart."

Then Margery entered the room, and they both looked up; Allan red and indignant, Una dove-like, but observant.

"Those earrings, for instance?" she said in an aside to her brother.

"Margery, dearest," said Allan, advancing towards her, and taking her hand in his, "how do you come by those earrings?"

"I found them on my dressing-table," said Margery, smiling very stilly, still seeing herself in her mind's eye with a tiara and a necklet, and a snake with ruby head twining up her arm. "You did not give them to me, did you?"

"No, my dear one. I wish I could, but you know——" and Allan grew very red, and hung his head abashed. He would have liked to have loaded Margery with gifts, but he had given her a bracelet once, and she had asked him one or two questions, and then succeeded in persuading him to return it to the jeweller.

Margery's horror of things not paid for

was quite a feature in her character, though it would be well for the world in general if others shared it. However, whatever Allan's feelings might be, he knew that Una was standing by listening, so he looked up, and said, rather gravely,

"If you found those earrings in your room, they must be a present from some one, and they are too handsome for my promised wife to receive from anyone but me."

"You do not like me to wear them, Allan?" A blank look of disappointment, a quiver of the lip, and Margery's hand was raised at once to take out the earrings. She looked at them sorrowfully as she said—"Lord Talboys lost a Philippine to me, and he asked me if I should like earrings, so I thought they were from him. But now I had better return them,

I suppose, and make up my mind to go through life without diamonds."

Allan, who would have cut off his right hand rather than have vexed her, could only repeat mournfully,

"They are too handsome—too handsome for him to give you."

"After all, if they are a Philippine, she might as well keep them, Allan," said Una, who fully sympathised in Margery's regrets over her earrings, and saw nothing to be gained by her giving them back. "Everyone knows Lord Talboys does not know what to spend his money upon, and for him to give earrings is like another man giving gloves. It would make quite an affair of it returning them, and hurt poor old Talboys' feelings dreadfully. Let me fasten them into your ears again, Margery. I am sure Allan won't mind. It is quite a different thing from Lord Talboys giving

you a present; of course he had to give you something, as he lost to you. It would decidedly be bad taste to return them, Allan," and she began fastening them into Margery's ears again.

"So you do care for diamonds, after all?" said Lottie Spluck, who had just entered, and had been contemplating the little scene somewhat scrutinizingly.

Margery did not speak, but her lips parted in a smile, the colour mantled on her cheeks, and her eyes shone.

"Wear this star, then," said Lottie, carelessly. "It would look very nice in your dark hair. As for me, diamonds don't become me," and she took the star from her own hair and fastened it into Margery's.

Margery started and turned pale, rather because of the touch of Lottie's fingers than from any consciousness of additional

diamonds, which certainly this time she could not see. But she caught her reflection in a distant mirror, and said, quickly,

"I cannot wear your diamonds. They are too valuable, and you do not care for me."

"Does Lord Talboys?" asked Lottie. "Anyhow, I shall not wear that star again. I hate it. So keep it, or put it into the poor-box, just as you like. Flowers are much nicer than diamonds," and she took up a rosebud from the table, and first pressing it to her lips, as if to suck every breath of sweetness from it, stuck it in her hair.

Allan turned red and white. He did not know if Lottie had meant to insult Margery, or not; besides, was she aware that he had brought that rosebud from his own favourite bush, and had been playing with it up to the last moment, when she pressed

it to her lips? He had meant it for Margery. Well, Lottie had it now.

Lord Talboys came in while he was still wondering, and Margery, gleaming with diamonds, made her acknowledgments to him in her stateliest, stiffest manner.

"Only they are too handsome, Allan says," she added.

"Too handsome!" cried Lord Talboys, looking round at Allan, as if to say, "How could you be such an idiot as to say any such thing!" Then, turning again to Margery, "As if any jewel ever could look handsome, when placed in such trying proximity to your eyes! But what a lovely star you have in your hair! I have seen it before, I think, but it seems more properly to belong to you than it ever did to Miss Spluck."

"That is as it should be," said Lottie, whose voice always acquired a slightly

nasal twang when she was put out. "For the star belongs to Miss Travers now. I have just given it to her, and taken this rosebud instead. Does it look as if it belonged to me?"

"Roses and lilies are always natural to Miss Spluck," said Lord Talboys, bowing, with his hand on his heart.

"You did not mean to give me these diamonds?" asked Margery, turning anxiously towards the American heiress.

"I guess I never want to see them again. I hate such trash!" said Lottie, and walked away.

Margery did not thank her, but turned away also, disgusted at such, as she thought, bombastic assertion of superiority. What did a girl, who might buy a fresh set every day, know of the value of diamonds? It was very well for her to talk of preferring rosebuds!

"Don't be uneasy—I'll answer for it they're not paste," said Lord Talboys, pretending to misunderstand her mortified expression. "How you outshine them all!" he added, almost under his breath. "No wonder they are jealous."

"Of what? Of your admiration?" asked Margery, looking at him steadily.

Then she also walked away, and sat down on a sofa by herself. She had meant to go to Allan, but he was bending over Lottie, speaking to her, as it seemed, rather gravely. In a moment or two Lord Talboys followed Margery. He appeared fascinated by the shimmer of her diamonds. Una began to think she had made a mistake in allowing her to keep them.

"He is the best young fellow I know," said Lottie Spluck to herself that evening, as she sat by the window of her own room,

and looked out, after everyone had retired for the night. "Quite the best!"

She set her lips, and gazed out on to the Priory grounds, looking even more beautiful than by day, in the clear, still moonlight. She knew how heavily the estate was mortgaged, and a great deal more altogether about the Stapletons' affairs than they at all imagined. She was not an American for nothing. She set her mouth, and thought of her own money, and how comfortable it would make things at the Priory, and how it would set Allan on his legs again.

"He is worth it," said Miss Spluck, almost as if she were concluding a bargain, and considering whether she had made a good one. "As for that girl, she is the kind of girl men fall in love with, lots of them. But they don't marry that kind, at least not often. And she don't care for

him, not really. She looks down on him as a good, honest fellow. The meanness of her! I could hate her when I think of it. Poor miserable creature! I believe at this moment she wouldn't be sorry to be off with him, and engaged to Lord Talboys, because of his money. Money! money! Why doesn't Allan care for money?"

She sat still and cried, for after all, whether Margery loved Allan or not, there could be no doubt but that he loved her; and would he ever cease to do so, even if she threw him over, as Lottie believed her capable of doing?

"He must care for me in the end," Lottie cried, at last. "I never cared for anyone else, and he did care for me last Spring. Why shouldn't I make him care for me again? I'd make him such a wife, too! As for that girl! she might be a

prima donna, but never a good wife—never to Allan!"

Poor little Lottie! admired and fêted from her cradle upwards, respected as a great heiress when she toddled along in blue shoes, upheld by a broad blue sash. Always to have had her sweet girlish face, and prétty girlish ways, and loving, amiable disposition thrown into the background by the startling brilliance of her great fortune! And to have been taught from babyhood upwards that that fortune could get her everything, and to have found that that was the case for twenty of those long, long years of youth, such different and much longer years than those that succeed them! And now to wish for something more than she had ever wished before, and to have thought she had it, and to find herself deceived, and that Margery Travers had it, and did not care for it!

Poor, pretty, petted little heiress! It was a bitter experience of life that she was making now. Yet she never blamed Allan, or loved him one whit the less, because he had brought this pain upon her, and partly through his own fault. And, I think, certainly *she* thought that she could have forgiven Margery, if she had valued the love Allan lavished upon her. But the shrewd little American, the girl that loved Allan Stapleton, knew Margery did not love him, and it was that made her hate her. Yet sometimes she even pitied Margery more than she hated her, and had a dim perception that, though Allan Stapleton might be the ideal husband for herself, he could not be the ideal husband for Margery, and that perhaps she was not altogether so much to blame for not loving him more. It was this feeling that had made her cry when Margery had told the story

of herself, a forlorn, uncared-for child, turned out of the burial-ground, and only looked for by the cook of the inn. That was the saddest touch of all to Lottie. To have a father who was yet none! Far better to have been an orphan always, like herself!

But now, as she turned from the window, she began to cough, and anyone who had seen how the colour mounted to her face, and how her fragile frame shook under the influence of that cough, would have pitied the young, motherless girl, and forgiven her a greater sin than that of longing for Allan Stapleton's love, and being bitter against Margery for having won it from her. But Lottie did not see herself, nor pity herself.

"There, now, I must take those drops again, I suppose," she said, quite cheerily. "I guess I thought I'd done with them

since I'd come to Europe. A good thing old Van don't know I've been sitting at an open window in an evening dress. Wouldn't she give me a scolding? But I'll never confess how I took cold. Girls in books always turn consumptive when their love affairs don't go straight. I can't *turn* consumptive, only I might make up my mind to die of it, I suppose—just to spite them all. But, after all, who'd care? And whom *could* I leave my money to?"

So she rang the bell for her maid, and went to bed, like a practical girl as she was; but, in spite of the drops, she had another fit of coughing, and wished heartily she had put on a shawl, or shut the window.

"You may as well give me a mustard plaster," she said to her maid. "I always like the feel of one—it is so natural, and will make me fancy I'm at home and a

child again. No, not one of those horrid Rigolots—real mustard, and lots of linseed."

CHAPTER XI.

A FRENCH MAID'S REFLECTIONS.

THERE were others who thought somewhat as Lottie did. Margery and Una were friends in a way, and sometimes they talked together quite confidentially—that is to say, Una talked, and Margery listened.

One evening Una went into Margery's room before dinner, and told her she was to put on her diamonds again.

"I'll tell you why presently," said Una. "Yes, that's right, Elise. There, you see, Margery, dear, I knew white silk would be the very thing for you, and you hadn't

got one, so I've been making Elise arrange a dress for you. The skirt isn't absolutely new, but I thought you wouldn't mind that. I couldn't afford to buy altogether a new dress just now, and Elise has been re-arranging it all for you, and stealing your evening dress for the fit, whenever you went out for long enough. Now you'll look like an Empress indeed to-night. I don't know why I take trouble to dress you up," added Una, naïvely, "but somehow I like to see you look well, and I always feel for any woman who isn't dressed in her own style. Unfortunately, your style is such an expensive one. But as it is, this is pretty, is it not?"

"Dear Una, how kind!" cried Margery, the tears rushing into her eyes, as she enveloped the dainty little creature in an almost passionate embrace. "I never shall understand you, Una. Now, as you

are just now, and as you were the first night I came, I never could love you enough, I think. Then there are times when——"

"I wonder when you'll have a *grande passion?*" interrupted Una, looking up at her with a whimsical expression that often flitted now into the eyes that were once so dove-like. Seeing her look up now, no one would ever dream that Una had once played the part of a young *ingénue;* but, with her eyes on the ground, you might still take her for a little nun any day. "You're just made for it, Margery. Have you ever been in love?"

"Una! Allan!"

"Now, my dear Margery, don't. Of course I know it is a love-match on Allan's side, and I quite believe you like him very well, and all that, but he is not the kind of man you could ever be in love with in

the way I mean. You're a strange creature, Margery; if you were to walk down a dirty alley, or into the most crowded drawing-room at St. James's, people would stand still and stare at you just the same, and I believe you would have just the same satisfaction in one case as in the other. Now as for me, I love admiration; and though, of course, I shall never care again as I did once for one man, yet I should like every man I met to be half in love with me. Tell me, did you never care for anyone as I cared once?"

"How was that?" asked Margery, gravely.

"We seemed to understand each other," said Una, sadly. "Did you never meet anyone like that, who seemed from the first moment he saw you to know intuitively what you wanted and cared about—to whom it seemed hardly necessary to speak, he understood you so well, whose

most casual glance conveyed more to you than torrents of words from other men?"

Her little hands were resting on the top of the chest of drawers; they trembled as she spoke, and the face that was bent over them was pale and drawn. She was not whiter than usual, but she looked as if she might faint the next moment, and Una's whiteness did not generally suggest the idea of fainting.

"I once met a man something like that," said Margery, thoughtfully. "But I only just met him, and I don't think he would be like that now, if I met him again. He was ready to be impressed by everything, to sympathise with everyone. People like that are most likely to go down-hill, but, of course, they are the most charming beforehand. It is very sad it should be so. However, I never met but one."

"How you will love, Margery, when your time comes!"

"Una, how can you!" exclaimed Margery. "I love Allan."

"Oh, yes, you love Allan," said Una, lightly. "As if I didn't know that he often bored you almost to exhaustion! As if I didn't know your expression when he always says, 'Sing that song you sang last night, dear Margery!' He is a good fellow, and I only wish I had a chance of half so good a husband as he will be; but he *bores you*, Margery, he bores you terribly, and some day you will fall in love with some one else."

"And if I did," said Margery, softly, "I would tear my heart out myself rather than give him a moment's pain. Think, Una, you see me here courted and admired because he has set me on a pinnacle as his promised bride, and so everyone is good

and kind to me. But Allan loved me when he found me a poor, desolate girl, without a friend to turn to. He knew me shabbily dressed and shabbily lodged, and leading such a dull, shabby life, that I often wonder now how I endured it. I had had plenty of misery before, God knows, but that dreary time of dulness, when I first came to England, is the most dreadful time to me to look back upon. I cannot bear to think of it even now. You know, Una, that I have only one hundred pounds a year, though you, who are accustomed to spend what you like, can have no idea what it is to have that to live upon. And I never have had that till quite lately, for money had been drawn in advance, and there were all sorts of things. Often and often I have had nothing but bread and coffee all day. I do not care to eat much, but it is very wretched to be

hungry all day long. Once, I recollect, Allan came, and found me like that, and I wondered afterwards if he knew what had made me so dull and down-spirited—that I was hungry. He has taken me away from all that, and brought me to be here among you all, and you know, Una, that he never once thinks that he has done anything for me, nor acknowledges that I have any cause to be grateful to him. You know, Una, that he would lie down and be trampled on for my sake any day, and that he would risk his life to gain happiness for me. You know this all is so, and I know it; and when I know all this, and think of all this, what kind of heartless creature should I be if I did not love him—if it could be possible for me ever to give him pain by caring for anyone else?"

Una had sunk down on a low footstool,

and was leaning her face on her hands, looking up at Margery, with her eyes full of tears.

"It would be a bad look-out for Allan," she said, speaking very slowly. Then she rose, and put her arms about Margery, and laid her little weary face on her bosom. "If I ever were that kind of heartless creature, would you forgive *me*, Margery? If you found out one day that I was very bad indeed, would you love me still a little?"

A shudder passed through Margery.

"I cannot bear bad people," she said, almost under her breath, and quite involuntarily.

But Una heard her, and moved away at once.

"Then recollect," said she, speaking with a bitterness quite unusual to her, "that love and gratitude are just as far asunder

as the poles; and that the woman who is grateful *lies* when she says she loves. Oh! I can go into heroics too. But just now there is no time for them. You must make haste and dress. Elise is to stay and do all she can to make you more beautiful than ever. There's the rising portrait painter of the day coming to-night. No end of grand people have taken him up all of a sudden, and Lottie has chosen him out of all the world to paint her picture. When she consented to come here, it was only on condition that he should come too, for in no other way could she afford time to sit to him. I mean to have my picture done too, I think, for he is soon to be so much the fashion that no one is to be a beauty any longer whom he has not painted. So make yourself very queenly and irresistible. I am really longing to see you well dressed for once. And it is most

apropos that my dress should just be ready for Mr. Bruce's arrival."

"Bruce!—Bruce!" repeated Margery, trying to remember if she had not heard that name before. But Una had flitted away, leaving a dull anxiety on Margery's heart, and there was Elise waiting to array her in the dress that was in reality the pride of the French maid's heart. It was all white, white silk, and white tulle, and white lace, but the design of it had kept Elise awake the greater part of many nights, and led to many consultations with her young mistress. The silk was, as Una had said, not absolutely new, but both she and Elise had been determined to turn out a dress such as would have graced a Court Ball, even had it been held at the Tuileries.

"Elise, is Miss Stapleton happy, do you think?"

"Why not?" replied Elise, busying her-

self with some fancies of her own as to Margery's hair. "Young, lovely, admired —what should she want more? An only daughter, too, and as absolute mistress of this beautiful house as if she were married to the master of it."

"Then you think she is happy?" said Margery. "She is certainly very kind. This is the most lovely dress, I think, I have ever seen."

"When you have got it on, there will not be two opinions about that, that is one comfort," said Elise, gratified by Margery's approbation. "And if you knew what pains Mademoiselle has taken about it! When she would not take the shooters their luncheon the other day, and all the afternoons you have been out riding, Mademoiselle has always been fussing over this dress, as if she had no confidence in me at all. She certainly has wonderful ideas, for

a young lady. It is a pity she was not born a dressmaker; she would have made her fortune, and there would not have been so much heard of M. Worth. There are things in this dress I should never have thought of. This day month I am to be allowed to send the description of it to one of the best dressmakers, with whom Mademoiselle deals occasionally. Dear me, it is to be wished she may marry a rich man, for she must spend enormously."

Margery had got the dress on now, and Elise had led her before the long glass.

"I am almost frightened of myself," said Margery. "I did not think dress would have made so much difference in me."

Elise smiled triumphantly.

"It seems almost wicked to make oneself so much more beautiful than one really is."

Elise shrugged her shoulders.

"There is nothing false," she said, drily —"only a beautiful dress, and diamonds, and a little lifting of your hair, and then, what the good God made you to begin with. But, for my part, I am not sure that all beauty is not *beauté du diable.* It seems a sin anyone should be so beautiful. Look at me—I am well enough—no deformity, nothing wrong, good teeth, plenty of hair; but no man would go mad from looking at me."

Elise forced her own yellow, skinny, but rather *espiègle* face, into the same mirror that reflected Margery's transcendent loveliness. Her well-worn black *cachemire* formed a background to Margery's silk and lace.

"Elise, I would rather be like you!" cried Margery, suddenly turning round and seizing both her hands. "You could always be sure that the man who loved

you loved you for your own self and your good heart."

"But, *ma princesse*, no man ever has loved me but a poor, half-witted fellow. Who in his senses ever would, indeed? Not but that I have a certain *cachet*, which, with advancing years——And as to a good heart, why should a woman with a plain face have a better heart than a woman with a fair one?"

"Then sometimes, when you send down Miss Stapleton so pretty, and so lovelily dressed, you feel sad, and wish yourself in her place?" said Margery, looking sorrowfully at the superficially bright beads that with Elise took the place of eyes.

"Wish myself in her place! I'd sooner be in purgatory—there'd be a chance of heaven at last, then!" cried Elise. "Mademoiselle Una gets letters; sometimes she slips one in her pocket. I always know

when that will be the case. It is an ugly handwriting, and gives me *la migraine* just to look at it. Then the Petite says, in her little mignonne voice, 'You may go now, Elise; I shall water my flowers before I go down to breakfast.' But it is not necessary to lock the door while she waters her flowers, and when I come—to see all is right, of course—I pass my hand over the pillow. It is wet, *ma princesse*—it is wet. Then Mademoiselle Una has a pretty colour at breakfast—generally she is pale in the morning—but those days she has such a pretty colour, everyone is pleased to see it. That has happened *five* times this month, but the last two times the pillow was dry. How do you account for that, *ma belle?*"

"I don't know," said Margery, uneasily.

"When a woman is sad—it may be strange, but it is true—she generally throws herself upon her bed, even if she

has ever such a pretty sofa. That is why I used to pass my hand over the pillow. But when a woman is very miserable—when she is in despair—what does she do then, *ma Princesse?*"

Elise's inquisitive eyes were fixed upon Margery's face. Margery reddened under her gaze as she answered, shortly,

"I don't know."

"No, no, of course not—how should *you* know anything about that?" cried Elise, waving her hand towards the mirror rather than towards Margery herself. "But I know—I, Elise—she lies on the floor. Think of the *petite, la petite blonde,* who looks as if she were made of lace, and flowers, and milk—think of her all alone on the floor, and going down with that pretty colour on her cheeks, and not a soul knowing—not her father, nor her mother, nor her brother, not anyone in

the house, unless it be that *vieux* my lord, ever guessing that her heart is broken—broken! And she so pretty!" said Elise, "and so amiable, always thinking this one would like a ball, that one must have a ride, the gentlemen must go out shooting, and never anything thought of for herself—never anything but just a drive with that *vieux* my lord. No one ever notices it, but I notice it," said Elise; "and as to that *bête* Lady Stapleton, I could shake her on that sofa where she lies; and as to Sir James, I should like to bawl the truth into his ears; and as to M. Allan, why, *ma Princesse* has turned his head for him, so no one can wonder at anything he does."

"Then you love Una really?" asked Margery, still looking anxiously, as if to read something in the Frenchwoman's eyes, that were yet so thoroughly inscrutable for very shallowness.

"Love her! Not I!" cried Elise, snapping her fingers. "Mademoiselle Una was not made to be loved, and she has confided nothing in me—nothing. She has as little confidence in me as if I had come to her yesterday. And she is quite right," said Elise, "quite right. It is for that I admire her. But listen, now! that great *bête* of a Lady Stapleton engaged as governess for her daughter, when she was fourteen, a Parisienne, an acquaintance of mine. And, Mademoiselle, I was in the service of actresses till I came here. *Eh bien!* I have seen a little book on Mademoiselle's table, sometimes, a Bible," said Elise, with a curious look out of her eyes. "Would Mademoiselle believe it, it is my writing in that book. *She* was too weak to write, and I wrote for her. Now I leave *ma Princesse* to judge—was I the maid to put about a young girl like Miss Stapleton,

and I came to her when she was seventeen? But *le bon Dieu*, who they say arranges it all, though we don't find it out always, he knows that my acquaintance, the governess —the governess and friend, Mademoiselle —was not plain like me. She was bound to find me a place, or else I could have told some secrets about her, and she found me this, because she knew it would be a good one, and a good one it has been, and will be, and I shall stick to Mademoiselle Una till one or both of us is dead. But love her, oh, no! she is a character to pity, not to love. Does Mademoiselle know each time she goes out driving with milord, I get a pair of new gloves. I suppose he kisses the little hands, that are so *mignonnes*. One day, indeed, I thought I would say as much, so I said to Mademoiselle, 'I suppose you will give me your lips, too, some day.' She looked at me in that curious

way she has, and she said, 'My gloves were fresh this morning. If you do not like them, you can throw them away.' And yet I am as sure as sure Lord Talboys will only leave the Priory to marry her."

"I hope not—I hope not!" cried Margery, breaking down at last. "Oh! I thought I had come into a beautiful new world, and it is just the same old wicked world as ever."

"Yes," said Elise, "the world is much the same, wherever you go. But it all depends with what eyes you look at it. Mademoiselle has got the little old book that poor dying woman sent her."

"Yes, I have got it," said Margery. "But I do not understand it."

"Mademoiselle is blinded with her own beauty, perhaps, or her pride, or who knows what?" said the Frenchwoman. "They say the most ignorant and simple

can understand that book. As for me, I have never looked at it. But now, Mademoiselle, go down and make M. Allan turn white, and the *vieux* my lord red, with the veins standing out on his forehead. I saw the young artist arrive to-day. He sprang out of the carriage with half his painting things in his hands, as if there were not a dozen servants to carry them for him, and he looked all round him, and exclaimed, 'What a beautiful place!' without thinking who could hear, and in a tone that made one's heart feel warm at once. I know he will fall on the ground at Mademoiselle's feet, and hardly dare kiss the hem of her dress, and then he will ask to paint Mademoiselle's picture, but he will never do it, for each time he looks at her the brushes will fall from his fingers, and there will be something graven deep on his heart, but not a touch on the canvas. Oh, I know

artists. Plenty used to come and paint my last mistress, and some used to come in carriages, and get out as solid and important as if they were doctors. They asked large prices, and they did their work well, but no ideas—no ideas! Then there were others in threadbare coats, who made one wish to kiss the picture, they had thrown that *on ne sait quoi* about it, but their workmanship was poor—poor, like a woman who drops her stitches. Then there were others——But this young man, he is full of ideas; he bounds, he springs, he does not walk. He adores the beautiful, and only what is perfect does he care to paint; but he is young, and has not had time to study for that yet. He should be studying with models; but he will try to paint *ma Princesse*, and the brushes will fall from his hands, and he will go away with a white, white face, and Mademoiselle

will marry M. Allan, and think no more of that young man's career blighted than I shall when it is all over."

"Elise, you will drive me mad!" said Margery. "You talk so fast, I cannot understand you. Are you good or bad? Do you mean to make me miserable, or what do you mean?"

"Mademoiselle, I am intoxicated with my own success," replied Elise, jokingly, once more motioning to Margery to look at herself in the glass.

But Margery turned away. She had looked at herself enough. With a confused memory of the Frenchwoman's words, she went downstairs, more beautiful, and less conscious of it, than she had ever been in her life before.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIVE MINUTES BEFORE DINNER.

THERE was quite a large gathering at the Priory when Margery came shimmering into the long drawing-room in white silk and diamonds, and they all ceased talking, and drew aside and looked at her, as they had a trick of doing, she was so very beautiful, and she moved so perfectly.

There was a little knot of young people clustered round the piano, Una, with her innocent fairness, and Lord Talboys whispering into her ear; Lottie, with her soft curls, and sweet girlish face turned appealingly to Allan, who was standing, tall, and

fair, and distrait, watching for Margery, rather than paying any attention to Lottie; and between the two a young man with eyes that glowed as with an inward fire, and a face that glowed too, when he spoke, and became animated. He had an aquiline nose, and a lithe, flexible figure, expressive of great agility; but the charm about Dalrymple Bruce—and he was already quite sufficiently the fashion for everyone to be quite well aware that there was a charm about him—was the intelligence and enthusiasm so clearly visible in every line of his mobile features.

He was the young artist whom Miss Lottie Spluck had selected to have the honour of painting her portrait, and he was studying her face now, and deciding that he had been quite wrong in his previous conception of it. There must be something pensive and romantic about her

portrait. He had thought to paint her as a ball-room belle distributing presents in the cotillon; his first idea had certainly been quite wrong. He began to recall the story of the milkmaid who had counted on the profits her eggs would bring her in the market, and built air castles, with the eggs for foundation, and got so absorbed in her castle-building, she had only been roused from her day-dream by the basket falling from her head, and the eggs lying broken before her on the meadow. He thought he should like to paint Lottie as a milkmaid, and choose the moment when the contents of the basket all lay strown around her, and she recalled her dream only to realise how impossible it had now become.

Then the door was thrown open, and Margery entered through it, and there was a slight pause in the buzz of talk round the

room, and everybody glanced round and looked at her.

The artist's face lighted up, as every artist's must have, beholding such exquisite grace of movement, such perfect harmony of feature. Then his eyes glowed with a different expression, and he sprang forward, and seized her hand.

"You here!" he exclaimed. "Who would have thought it? How I have longed to meet you again!"

Margery's first look of surprise was succeeded by a glad smile of recognition, while the colour mounted to her cheek under the ardour of his glowing eyes, and she returned the pressure of his hand somewhat shyly.

Dalrymple glanced quickly at her diamonds and her dress, took them all in, and the surroundings in which he found her, and exclaimed:

"So you have made your *début*, and you have succeeded! Oh! tell me it was at Covent Garden. I cannot fancy you a mere actress. And yet how have I never heard of it? I have so watched for your name. Have you really appeared at Covent Garden already?"

"No—no! I have not," said Margery, shyly, her timid blush making her even lovelier than before, and her eyes moistening with the recollection of long-ago days, that seemed now so unutterably far off, which the sight of Dalrymple nevertheless recalled so vividly.

"Then when do you make your *début?* I must be there to see," cried the artist, too much excited even to see the change of expressions around him, and take warning by them.

"I am not going to be a singer," said Margery, shyly. "I am——"

And she moved a step forward, looking up at Allan gravely, sedately. The ground seemed to open beneath the artist for a moment. He had heard that young Stapleton was engaged—so this was the girl! This explained the diamonds, and all the rest of it. But who could have thought of such a thing? When a man falls in love with a woman at the first glance, he is apt to consider the man she is engaged to rather a clown. Allan Stapleton appeared at once unutterably common-place to the artist. He despised him too much even to consider him for the moment, or to think any more of the blunder he had made.

"Do you know, I owe everything to you?" he cried, following Margery, with his eyes still hanging upon her with that concentrated ardour which did as much as perhaps anything to make women find him irresistible. "You recollect that sketch I

took of you? The picture I afterwards painted from it was the first I exhibited at the salon. It was bought at the private view by a foreign Prince. Since then he has always honoured me, and I am become more or less the fashion in consequence—all thanks to you."

"I am so glad," said Margery, warmly. "You cared so much about success. You still think Art everything?"

"Everything," cried the young man, enthusiastically. "Think of inspiring even one human soul with a noble aim! Of consoling the suffering! Of inspiriting the weak!"

Margery's eyes dilated, and her bosom heaved.

"And all that by means of *genre* pictures," said Lord Talboys, in harsh, grating tones. He knew Dalrymple Bruce's pictures of a few years ago, and had bought one or two of

them; a girl gathering round her drapery, that seemed to have an inherent tendency to fall off; a Parisian *élégante* crossing a muddy street; a game of blind man's buff in the Louis Quinze period, with the petticoats raised to suit the French taste of to-day.

"I was not thinking of my own art," cried the young man, unabashed. "I was thinking of Miss Travers! No one can look at her, and doubt in what style she would sing."

"You shall hear me after dinner," said Margery, softly.

"Shall I?" and he bent forward impassioned, adoring. "And I shall paint your portrait—say that I may paint your portrait. You must sit to me again. I have dreamt of it—dreamt of my first model."

"He painted me long ago, and once as the beggar maid whom King Cophetua

wooed," explained Margery, looking up at Allan.

"In those days when I knew Miss Travers she was not in such radiant attire," said the artist, addressing no one in particular, but generally anyone who liked to listen. "She was rather attempting to conceal her beauty—a quite hopeless attempt—under an old dull dress. I asked her once if she, woman-like, coveted the gorgeous raiment of a certain Princess, then creating a *furore*, and she replied, 'I should always think I did any dress honour by wearing it rather than that it did me any.' I do not know if she still remains of that opinion," continued the artist, glancing at her and smiling, while his eyes glowed again, as for a moment they met hers. "But I painted her then with King Cophetua standing before her, offering her a crown and bridal dress, she ac-

cepting them as if she did them honour. The fault of the picture was," he added, turning to Miss Spluck with a whimsical laugh, "it always looked as if she would put on the bridal finery over her beggar's dress."

"A great fault," said Lottie, tossing aside her own flowing skirts a little, so as to reveal for a moment a lace-trimmed petticoat and fairy-like white satin foot of truly American dimensions.

Margery blushed somewhat; she stood there in white silk and tulle, it was true, with diamonds glistening upon her, but she was conscious of no lace-trimmed petticoat and no white satin shoe.

"Dinner," announced the butler.

"Thank Heaven!" whispered Una. "Take me in, do, Lord Talboys—I am fainting—I cannot wait till the right man comes."

"Am I not the right man?" whispered he; then, a little louder, "I should like to punch that artist's head for him."

"You're not the right man at all, then," said Una. "You should be taking Miss Travers." But she did not relinquish her hold upon his arm.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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